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**Paper title**: Integration ODL approaches in a conventional classroom: Lessons learnt from Hardap Educational Multimedia Project in Namibia.

**Sub Theme**: Innovation and Technology

**Author**: Donne Yvette Ferreira
Teacher, Origo Primary School, Rehoboth, Namibia
**Email**: donneferreira@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

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Title: Integrating ODL approaches in a conventional classroom: Lessons learnt from Hardap Educational Multimedia Project in Namibia

Track : Technology and Innovation

Abstract: This paper explores the development of Multimedia lessons using video and voice recordings for use in the primary school classrooms. An in-depth look at the process will highlight the different dimensions of the programme as it manifests in capacity building of teachers in scriptwriting, recording of video and audio and online collaboration. This project is innovative as it was the first time for primary school teachers in this context, to attempt integrating Open and Distance Learning (ODL) approaches, and specifically the multimedia content to enhance learning and teaching experience. Given the challenges in Mathematics and English, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) supported one experienced participant from Tanzania and 11 teachers from 6 primary schools in the Hardap Region in Namibia to embark on this innovative and ambitious project. The project was scheduled to take place over a one year period, completing the capacity building of teachers and the development of the Multimedia lessons. For the first time teachers from 6 different schools collaborated during and after the first capacity building workshop using various technologies such as Skype, Basecamp, Blackboard Elluminate, phone calls and text messaging. Various challenges were observed during the project but evengreater successes were achieved thereafter. The project is a proof that technology can blur the boundaries between ODL and conventional education and that capacity building is central in introducing new models, technologies and approaches to teachers who are in service. The paper recommends for further study on how to integrate this innovation to other Regions in Namibia. It envisages making these recommendations to the Ministry of Education and other relevant Stakeholders with similar goals.

Keywords: Educational multimedia content, Open and Distance Learning, Innovation, Conventional classroom

Primary Contact : Donne Ferreira (Origo) <donneferreira@gmail.com>

Authors : Donne Ferreira (Origo) <donneferreira@gmail.com> ,

## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the development of Multimedia lessons using video and voice recordings in the primary school classroom. This project was initiated by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) based in Vancouver, Canada. It enhanced the skills and knowledge of English and Mathematics teachers from six primary schools in the Hardap Region in Namibia

## Objectives of the project

The focus of the project was to equip rural teachers in Namibia through both theoretical and practical training, to use available electronic and digital technology to produce video lessons that can supplement face-to-face classroom teaching.

Educational programmes were to be developed in the format of video (electronically stored in DVD format), in two generic school subjects, namely English and Mathematics, focussing on the Grade 6 learners in Namibia.

Namibia, located on the South-Western coast of Africa is a modern low-income country, where internet technology is affordable, but not always reliably available as a teaching and learning resource.

The video lessons complements the learning content in the prescribed textbook. It, however, transforms the content to real life situations that the learners grasp, accept and identify with during the learning process. The DVD's can be used repeatedly and not become outdated in terms of the applicability of learning.

COL engaged a local Namibian consultant with a background in both electronic news journalism, and the development of training standards for the Namibian Training Authority as a trainer and facilitator of this project.

The training was entirely home-grown as the COL Education Specialist overseeing the programme, Ms Frances Ferreira, also hails from Namibia where she served as the Director of NAMCOL until joining COL in Canada. However there was collaboration from the North East of the continent to as will be explained.

## PROCESS

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) planned the training in three phases: a face-to-face workshop with hands-on training, an online strategy where the facilitator and participating teachers continued to collaborate, developing and editing scripts and plan for the next phase through Skype, Basecamp and Blackboard Elluminate, which were all new to the teams. The final phase was a practical phase where the lessons were filmed and narrated under supervision. As monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of COL's work, it was agreed that the teams that there would be a final session where the teams would assess and evaluate the technical quality and educational potential of the lessons.

We were trained to produce video lessons. Like for all the participants, this was my first exposure to lesson development in video format. We learnt that this would help us to improve our teaching abilities and to be more effective teachers. We could not imagine that we would create this material in two short training sessions.

Our expectations were high but vague. Even the terminology we read on the programme during the first day was foreign to us; fundamentals of broadcasting, script development, narrations, visuals, voice-overs, and ambience sounds etc. It was stupendous. Nevertheless, it was an exciting prospect to learn how to make movies, and so we approached the training with enthusiasm, embracing the opportunity. After the theoretical workshop we became more familiar with the terminology and when the second workshop began, we were more confident about Multimedia.

As we continued, increased confidence was developing and we were sure that our expectations would be fulfilled. We could not wait to find ourselves acting, narrating, directing and presenting in front of the camera. We had produced ten (10) video scripts during an online support period in the interim months from October to April when the second and practical workshop occurred.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

- To ensure proper planning and preparation for the project, COL put the following mechanisms in place: Completing a questionnaire to assess our own training needs in this field. (before the first workshop.)
- Another questionnaire was completed to identify training gaps following the first workshop, before the practical workshop began.
- We assessed the quality of the scripts which were developed following the first workshops and to assess the participants' competencies to develop Multimedia lessons.

COL analysed the responses from participants and the facilitator developed a training programme which addressed the training needs and deficiencies identified by the participants in their responses.

The first training (theoretical) workshop included the following areas of focus:

- Basics in journalism (video and TV broadcasting), to identify what makes video an effective tool of Education.
- Fundamentals of Scriptwriting: the who, what, when, where, how.
- Conversational styles: dialogue, drama, documentary style.
- How to plan for an Educational video production.
- Scripts: scripts-writing rules, word economy and simplicity in language.
- Sounds, voices, and visuals in a TV script.
- Copyright issues.
- Interviewing techniques
- Discussion about work plan and team planning.

A humorous yet important part of the first training workshop was a session for the participants to do interviews. We selected a few Grade 6 learners and interviewed them about their fears, hobbies, ambitions, role models and perceptions. This helped us to put together a profile of a Grade 6 learner since they were the target group for our video lessons. They also assisted us in identifying the aspects in English and Mathematics in the curriculum which they found problematic. This enabled us to identify video lesson topics to be developed at the conclusion of this session.

Script-writing followed. The first Mathematics and English lessons were done during the workshop, and we continued with the rest of the scripts as individuals after the workshop. We worked on a time schedule agreed upon with the facilitator and we had weekly sessions on Skype with her where she could provide guidance and we could discuss any difficulties we were experiencing.

During the last week of May 2013, we had the practical session on filming; eight (8) of the ten (10) identified lessons. (We agreed to drop the two (2) scheduled lessons due to the limited time.

## THE LESSONS DEVELOPED

### ENGLISH

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **PROGRAMME 1** | **ENGLISH GRAMMAR FOR GRADE 6** | **PROGRAMME TITLE:** Parts of speech |
| **PROGRAMME 2** | | **PROGRAMME TITLE:** Comprehension: Reading with understanding and debates |
| **PROGRAMME 3** | | **PROGRAMME TITLE:** Responding to poems: Attitudes and emotions expressed by the poet. |
| **PROGRAMME 5** | | **PROGRAMME TITLE:** Writing of complex sentences and short essays. |

### MATHEMATICS

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|---|---|---|
| **PROGRAMME 1** | **MATHEMATICS: BASIC OPERATIONS** | **PROGRAMME TITLE:** Division and multiplication with large numbers. |
| **PROGRAMME 2** | | **PROGRAMME TITLE:** Algebra: BODMAS rule. |
| **PROGRAMME 3** | | **PROGRAMME TITLE:** Measurements: capacity, mass, length. |
| **PROGRAMME 5** | | **PROGRAMME TITLE:** Fractions: conversions – decimals and fractions. |

## PROCESS FOLLOWED

The process followed throughout, was participatory, and through negotiation of deadlines and agreement about roles and deliverables. Towards the end of the first workshop, the participants agreed to follow a schedule for the completion of the scripts, and consulted the facilitator on any changes to the schedules. A date for the practical filming workshop was similarly agreed upon and everybody availed themselves knowing what was expected of them.

Arrangements for the filming sessions were made during prior weeks and these included that:

- Everybody had to memorise the content of all their subject scripts. (circumstances often demanded participants to switch roles, being actors, presenters and directors during production.)
- Punctuality and time discipline.
- Presenters of the script had to narrate the longer parts of the script and had to practice beforehand so that the reading of narrations went smoothly.
- Every person had the chance to be a director (be in charge of) one script. This person had to arrange beforehand, the necessary sets, props and other arrangements.
- All participants attended all eight (8) lesson shoots so as to learn from one another and have the opportunity both to observe and participate.
- Narrations were read and recorded at the end of each day in a room where it was totally quiet and free of echoes.

Key factors of the practical week of training, were that we had learning sessions twice a day, before going out to film the day's scheduled lessons.

These discussions were based on:

- Filming on set: roles, reporting lines, acting, voice and words, visuals.
- Camera basics: tripod, white balance, types of shots.
- Narration: preparation, voice projection, voice tone, speed of talking.
- Taking stock: lessons done, outstanding filming, visual and narration.
- Music: background, theme music.

At the end of each shoot, we returned to base for a discussion session where participants shared their experiences and observations during the shooting sessions.

## COLLABORATION

We began to refer to this Multimedia Development Project as HEMP. This is an acronym for Hardap Educational Multimedia Project. Hardap being our region in the South of the country, as all participating school are from this region. "Hemp" also means a shirt in the lingua franca of Namibia and reminds of getting dressed and ready for work.

HEMP was a collaboration between six participating rural schools, the Commonwealth of Learning and another training institution elsewhere in Africa.

COL's previous capacity building programme in multimedia lesson development was in 2012, at the Institute of Adult Education, IAE, in Tanzania, using the same training consultant at that session, after each conclusion, to join the Rural Schools project of HEMP – as reinforcement learning for that participant, but also to assist in facilitating the second practical workshop in Namibia.

This proved to be an excellent collaboration, as it achieved the exact product: The lecturer who is here in the person of Mr Belingtone Mariki, firmly internalised the training in multimedia programme development, and was a valuable co-trainer during the rushed 5 day programme to get eight (8) lessons filmed.

Mr. Mariki slipped into the role of recorder of narrations and while doing so, guiding the participants in voice projection, pronunciation and other aspects of the tricky skills of narrating. He also guided the director (one of the teachers) of the particular script how to do the direction. He taught us how to improve in certain skills.

For the collaboration between the ten (10) teachers from six (6) different schools is that we were complete strangers to one another. We had our own opinions and expectations. This experience was new to all of us; we encountered the same emotions but through all this, we could work well together as a team being understanding one other when experiencing difficulties in certain areas.

So HEMP participants were 10 teachers male and female, from different rural schools from the south of Namibia. These are primary schools in the towns of Rehoboth, Mariental, Kalkrand and Gibeon.

## LESSONS LEARNT

Technology is available and affordable in Namibia, and should be used to compliment teaching. However power cuts and internet availability can take days to get repaired in the rural areas.

The same media that help us communicate effectively with other regions across great distances can enable us to make video lessons, if we apply our minds. We have learnt that, and we are confident to apply.

The human mind is flexible to cope with difficulties on sight but it is the equipment that fails us. These are the following examples:

- Recorders can suddenly blank away the narrations of eight (8) programmes.
- Video cameras cannot produce too much work in the hot sun.
- To use electronic equipment need skill or training.
- Batteries lose power and need to be recharged or replaced.
- Technology is expensive.
- Mindful of the elements of nature during a full day of shooting: One scene was shot on the farm and the wind howled which made acting difficult and it also had an effect on sound production. – and on another day we had to work until evening; the negative effect being that we lost light fast and had to film in total darkness.

Planning: Proper planning is needed to obtain the right equipment and time sequence of doing things, people who should be involved, and permission to film on sets and to use music etc. We have to plan props, sets and actors, provide them with scripts timely before filming – so many things!

Script writing: It is a complex but essential skill for development of video lessons. Any project to development multimedia lessons for either radio or video lessons will require good scripts. This skill comes with practice and effort.

Sound: This adds substance to the "watch-ability" of the programme. It creates atmosphere and lends emotion and ambience to the production. Spoken sound must be clearly audible, dialogue. Sound is essential in explaining and validating visuals. Unintentional sound being recorded can be very distracting. Sound which is clear and appropriate enables the information to be better understood and retained.

Time management: Video lesson development takes time, skill and equipment. It cannot be done during our afternoon preparation for the next day's lesson. A project like this takes roughly 3 months to produce a series of say 5 lessons. This is a rough estimate.

Teamwork: It is essential. Our group was diverse, converging from over a number of rural towns. Even if the project was initiated at one school, roles and responsibilities had to be clearly defined to ensure effective progress.

Evaluation: This is crucial for ensuring the beneficial products and discussion of ideas for improvement and growth process experienced. During a critiquing session, teams hear others noting errors they are unable to spot themselves, which will assist in improving in future projects of this nature.

## GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Gender awareness was included in all aspects of training. Namibia is an open society respecting the rights and equality of all people. Yet a specific discussion on gender awareness helped to avoid stereotyping of roles allocated within the production team, as well as in acting roles in the script. Both women's and men's views, ideas, opinions, interests and needs shaped this work in learning for development.

Eight (8) good quality, interesting and interactive video lessons were made available to teachers to use as supplementary material in classroom teaching as well as online under COL's CC common license agreement, in terms of which these generic subjects will become available not only to all schools in Namibia, but online on the Internet as well.

Participants in this project understands the use and process of developing school textbook content into popular video format, and can apply this in a broader context as deemed necessary.

Video lessons is a fantastic, effective and affordable resource to offer distance learners who could either take out such lessons from the media library for a time, watch them in the media centre, or buy and exchange copies from learners.

## PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Participating in this project we could use our subject knowledge and convert it into practice. I became more aware that scriptwriters, producers and directors of movies and documentaries cannot have an easy task. Through this project I gained valuable insight to what everything was about. The project d provided me with confidence and competence when engaging with lessons, to put the tasks into practice. Taking the knowledge and skills I have acquired through this process back to school, I can apply and inspire learners to create their own stories, change them into dialogues, and this can enhance their writing skills. Multimedia allows the teacher to address various learning styles and provides us teachers with an excellent tool to bring our subjects to life. This is an amazing addition to resources already available to teachers whom are not limited to textbooks only. Lessons are more entertaining and therefore seize the attention of the learners. Learners have a better understanding of the lessons because they are exposed to the real world. Learners find Multimedia very entertaining and they can learn on their own. For learners who are consistently absent from school has the means of using multimedia and they can catch up with their work.

I am now aware of multimedia equipment and its use. Prior to this programme I had no interest in the usage of technology and Multimedia equipment, but now it is made available to teachers and learners. Classrooms are now being equipped with Multimedia tools like: white boards, projectors and laptops. At the conclusion we were able to complete our video lessons with great success and visible effect. A job well done!

## CONCLUSION

The paper recommends for further study on how to integrate this innovation to other Regions in Namibia. It envisages making these recommendations available to the Ministry of Education and other relevant Stakeholders with similar goals.