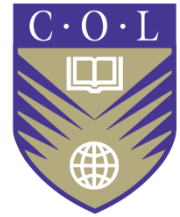


The Common Wealth of Humankind



*Asian Association of Open Universities
Conference, Wawasan Open University, Penang,
Malaysia, UNESCO-COL Workshop on Open Education
Resources, 1 October 2011*

*“The Common Wealth of Humankind”
Welcome and introductory remarks*

Sir John Daniel, Commonwealth of Learning

Introduction

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 in Penang for the AAOU conference to attend this event. We hope that by the end of the day you will be pleased with your decision to stay on.

It is a pleasure to thank Professor John Arul Phillips of the Asia eUniversity for facilitating this workshop. John is a person who ‘walks the talk’ on OERs. As you will hear, the Asia eUniversity has made the use of OER fundamental to their course development process.

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, although neither of them can be here with us today.

We are doing this because UNESCO and COL believe that OERs have considerable potential to widen access to higher 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 low cost.

The Story So Far

For this reason we thought it important that our project should bring the concept of OERs to the executive heads and senior leaders of Asian open universities and get your views on how they might impact teaching and learning in your institutions.

We began with similar exercises with Executive Heads of Commonwealth universities at the conference of the Association of Commonwealth universities in Cape Town last year and with senior people from national quality assurance agencies for higher education at the conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education that is being held in Windhoek in neighbouring Namibia.

Since then we have held workshops in Asia and Africa in Bamako, Mali and Kochi, India as well as in as well as in Mozambique and Tanzania. Today's is the seventh face-to-face event and we have also held three online forums.

The feedback from both these workshops will give us invaluable guidance for taking the rest of the project forward.

Let me begin today by arguing that OERs are entirely consistent with the best of our academic traditions. I want to shoot down the idea that using OERs is just a fancy form of plagiarism – an opportunity for academics to use others' teaching materials because they cannot be bothered to prepare their own.

I ask you to reflect 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 research 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 in conventional universities considered teaching to be a private activity – except, of course, for the students present. Department heads were shy of attending their colleagues' lectures and academics took time to accept student evaluations of their teaching.

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.

I took part in this transition when I was vice-chancellor of the UK Open University in the 1990s. We developed a system whereby colleagues aspiring to be promoted to a Chair – i.e. to Full Professor – had

to show excellence in two of the three functions of research, teaching and service to the academic community.

How do OERs fit into this evolutionary process? I return to the statements that teaching is the highest form of understanding and that knowing and learning are communal acts.

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.

I think of the OERs on the UK Open University’s *OpenLearn* website, which derive from courses developed by teams. The Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth is an extreme international example. It is a collaborative mechanism through which academics from up to twenty countries work together online to develop teaching and learning materials as OERs, which are then adapted and used by all to support both classroom teaching and distance learning.

OERs offer special advantages for distance learning – which is your primary concern as member institutions of the UKOU.

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, here in Africa for instance, 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.

My final comment is that OERs can facilitate intellectual exchanges that are genuinely multi-directional and multi-national.

There are concerns for us to discuss. At the session on OERs at UNESCO’s 2009 World Conference, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa, Professor Barney Pityana said he feared that OERs would promote a form of intellectual neo-colonialism whereby the rich north rams its OERs down

the throats of the poorer south. This provoked a vigorous debate with Brenda Gourley, another South Africa who was then the Vice-Chancellor of the UK Open University.

That does not have to happen – indeed, it is not happening. At the AAOU conference you heard about a programme for Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) through which thirteen African universities are working together to produce and use OERs for in-service teacher education. Last year half a 320,000 African teachers in ten countries adapted and used these OERs, which are available in Arabic, English, French and Kiswahili.

I can think of no better example than TESSA of how OERs are making it possible to expand access, raise quality and cut costs. They represent a revolution in higher education.

Next Steps

Let me conclude by bringing you up to date on our next steps in promoting that revolution.

After the first four workshops I mentioned we held a policy forum for governments on OER at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.

As a result we prepared two documents to support the campaign.

The first is a *Basic Guide to OER* written by South Africa's Neil Butcher under the editorial guidance of Professor Asha Kanwar and Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić. You can download that from COL's website.

The second document is *Guidelines for OER in Higher Education*. They were drafted by Zeynep Varoglu of UNESCO and Trudi van Wyk of COL with the aid of an international committee. Since then they have been the subject of an online consultation in which some of you may have taken part.

They are now being finalised and I shall launch them with the Director General of UNESCO, Ms Irina Bokova at the UNESCO General Conference on November 1st. I shall talk more about these Guidelines later in the programme.

In the next phase of the project, for which we have been offered support by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, we shall foster government support for OER internationally.

This will involve questioning governments about their policies and intentions on OER and open licensing. The result will be an inventory of current practices and policies with respect to open access to educational material that we shall share widely.

This process will lead into the drafting of a statement on open access for the World Conference on OER that UNESCO is hosting in June 2012. UNESCO's Member States expect opportunities for involvement in the drafting of statements presented to them for adoption.

Our principal consultant for this project is Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, who has recently retired as Head of Higher Education at UNESCO. She edited, with Professor Asha Kanwar, the *Basic Guide to OER* that I just mentioned, and she was Executive Secretary of UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education that flagged the importance OER. Earlier she led the project to get governments to agree

on *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education*, which required a similar process of consultation and negotiation to that which will be required for drafting a statement that governments can agree to.

The OECD is also promoting OER and since developing countries are sometimes suspicious of OECD initiatives we must create an inclusive process for drafting the Paris statement, preferably one that involves regional as well as global events and repeats the successful collaboration that UNESCO had with the OECD. Hewlett's support will help to strengthen that process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that this joint UNESCO – Commonwealth of Learning project has the potential to get the concept of open access to materials more fully absorbed into the bloodstream of education and we hope you will support it.

The Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO believe that knowledge is the common wealth of humankind.

Heads of Government set up the Commonwealth of Learning two decades ago because they believed that information and communications technology (ICTs) could help to equalise the distribution of high quality educational opportunities. OER are an important development in that direction

We are very much looking forward to next June's World Conference on Open Educational Resources and hope that you will all support this joint effort of UNESCO, the OECD and COL to bring OER thoroughly into the educational bloodstream.

We have long hailed the possibility of sharing ODL materials between institutions. With OER that possibility becomes a reality. I hope that we shall convince you how important that is in the rest of this workshop. I now invite Professor Asha Kanwar to continue that process.