

Connections



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LITERACY AND LIVELIHOODS EXPERTS MEET IN VANCOUVER

FOCUS IS ON "LEARNING FOR LIFE IN A CHANGING WORLD"

Twenty-six people from around the world gathered for the International Literacy and Livelihoods Experts Meeting, held 15-17 November 2004 in Vancouver. Organised by COL and supported by the British Department for International Development (DFID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), this meeting focussed on ways that COL can provide greater support to Commonwealth developing countries seeking to improve the livelihood opportunities of their illiterates. The international experts represented government, development agencies, non-governmental institutions (NGOs), international organisations and education institutions.



DELEGATES AT THE INTERNATIONAL LITERACY AND LIVELIHOODS EXPERTS MEETING

The first part of the meeting provided participants with background about COL and the issues and challenges involved in enhancing literacy and livelihoods programmes. There were also presentations about the current reality with respect to literacy and livelihoods education in the regions of the Commonwealth.

In his keynote, Sir John Daniel, COL President and CEO, discussed COL's role and the link between literacy and livelihoods. COL's task, he explained, is to get greater leverage on the challenge of preparing people for life in a changing world by using technology intelligently. This will be accomplished by bringing together our organised knowledge and by being very sensitive to the social systems in which we are operating.

"The challenge before you in the next few days is to advise us how we might combine the potential of technologies with what we know about literacy and livelihoods to achieve impact at scale," Sir John concluded. "The fundamental purpose, let us remember, is to reduce poverty and hunger through such interventions."

THE CURRENT REALITY

The four keynote presentations that focused on literacy and livelihoods development in the broader global context included:

- UNESCO's Adult Literacy Initiative: "Literacy Initiative for the Excluded (LIFE)" by Dr. Qian Tang, Director, Executive Office, Education Sector, UNESCO, Paris, France

- "Literacy and Livelihoods for Youth at Risk – the SERVOL Experience" by Mr. Martin Pacheco, Executive Coordinator, Service Volunteered for All (SERVOL Ltd.), Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago
- "Conceptualisation of Education Reform in the Pacific from a Cultural Perspective with Particular Reference to Literacy & Livelihoods" presented by

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THE TSUNAMI AND ITS AFTERMATH

COL joins its sister agencies in expressing its sympathy for the victims of the recent Asian tsunami and shares the world's concern over its lingering impact. The Asian Development Bank estimates that the long-term effect could throw nearly two million additional people into poverty.

Ironically, although there was no warning system in place to reduce the loss of life along the shores of the Bay of Bengal, word of the disaster spread around the globe instantly thanks to modern technology (video cameras, cell phones, the World Wide Web, e-mail, text messaging) and dominated the news for weeks.

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LINKING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AND LIVELIHOODS IN BANGLADESH

Mobile boat schools are providing a unique learning opportunity for people who live in the most remote areas of Bangladesh. The Mobile Internet-Educational Unit on Boats (MIEUB) initiative was developed by Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha, a national voluntary NGO, through funding provided by COL's Poverty Reduction Outcomes Through Education Innovations and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) programme.

The boats travel the extensive network of rivers and streams in Bangladesh, collecting students from different riverside areas and then anchoring at the side of the river. Using solar energy to power technical equipment such as computers and projectors, the boats provide learning in several ways:

- Library facility. Girls and young women who aren't involved in the formal education system have access to books, computers and other learning resources.
- Micro-enterprise development. Targeted at young women, this programme provides small business training. Participants receive support in starting small-scale income-generating activities, which in turn, provide parents with the income to pay education expenses and keep their children in school.
- Evening education programmes on large screens. Children and their parents have access to basic non-formal education. The eight-month programme is arranged according to age groups and attracts 250–300 people for each educational show. There are also classes in human rights education.
- Distance education for farmers. The mobile Internet-educational units provide multimedia displays, mobile phones, e-mail and Internet features that provide distance education on agricultural and environmental issues, as well as information on commodity and farm input prices.

In a country where the majority of the population is illiterate, the MIEUB programme is making a significant impact. The enrolment of girls in primary education has increased. The literacy rate is improving. The overall health of the water system and agricultural productivity are on the rise. And the quality of life has improved for thousands of people.

LITERACY AND LIVELIHOODS EXPERTS MEETING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Mr. Mahendra Singh, Project Manager, Pacific Regional Initiatives for Delivery of Basic Education (PRIDE), Suva, Fiji

- “Meeting the Literacy and Livelihoods Agenda in Sub-Saharan Africa” by Mr. Arvil Van Adams, Senior Advisor for Social Protection, Africa Region, The World Bank, Washington, DC, USA

Additional “current reality” information was provided by other participants who accepted the invitation to prepare background papers on literacy and livelihoods in their respective countries or on a related topic. Those 16 papers are posted on the meeting website at www.col.org/programmes/conferences/literacy-andlivelihoods.htm.

EXPLORING THE OPPORTUNITIES

The second part of the meeting focused on eliciting advice for initiatives that COL could take on in the area of literacy and livelihoods development. Participants were divided into four working groups to explore the best opportunities for COL to add value and provide recommendations regarding how COL might pursue these priority opportunities.

The opportunities were identified as:

- Policy Development
- Linking Function
- Research & Evaluation
- Technology Applications

- Information Management
- Training
- Content/Materials Development
- Niche Opportunities (i.e. illiterate women in large cities due to the growing rural to urban migration)

Each working group set priorities among these opportunities and recommended the actions, strategies and resources that COL should consider in order to realise the opportunities.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

There was unanimous agreement among meeting participants that the acquisition of literacy skills needs to be integrated with learning for livelihoods in both formal and informal contexts. The development of literacy skills must have a practical application in the context of the lives of the learners. And for policy makers, it must have a demonstrably positive impact on national socio-economic objectives.

The group strongly supports the COL initiative to establish a programme area that focuses on this challenge.

The group also outlined several principles they felt should guide COL as it moves forward. COL's activities in this area should lead to sustainability and scalability of applicable outcomes and must be:

- consistent with the open and distance learning (ODL) and technology mediated learning mandate of COL;

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF LITERACY EDUCATION

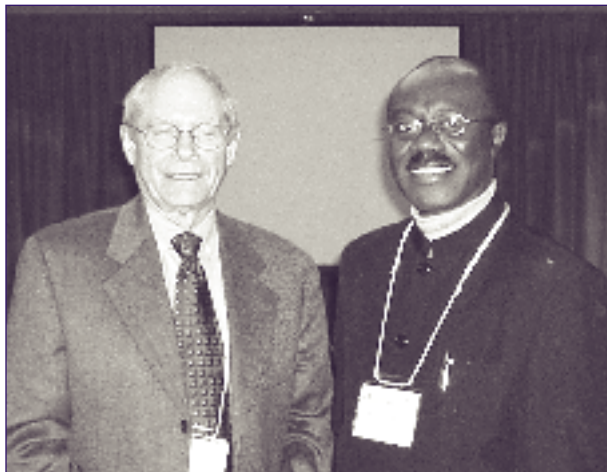
Beyond learning reading, writing and numeracy, what's the impact of literacy learning on everyday life? This is discussed in the final report of the COL Literacy Project (COL-LIT). With support from the British Department for International Development (DFID), COL undertook a pilot project in India and Zambia to explore ways in which literacy programmes might be enhanced through the use of appropriate technologies.

Upon completion, the three-and-a-half year COLLIT project revealed that the most profound impact of these literacy initiatives was the effect it had on the learners' self-esteem and on the way they used their newly acquired literacy skills in everyday life.

The findings of the COLLIT project, outlined in more detail in the project report,

“ICT and Literacy: Who benefits?” (www.col.org/consultancies/04literacy.htm), include:

- No matter how rudimentary the literacy skills acquired, most learners start to use them immediately. The most frequently cited examples were reading bus schedules, signs and advertisements. Learners who were involved in agriculture started reading agriculture commodity prices. Several people reported reading newspapers, books and their children's textbooks.
- Although learners used writing skills less than reading skills, being able to sign their name and do small writing tasks enhanced their self-esteem. People reported using writing skills to sign forms and applications such as ration cards, attendance registers, children's



MEETING ORGANISERS
DR. GLEN FARRELL (LEFT)
AND MR. JOSHUA MALLET,
COL EDUCATION SPECIALIST,
LITERACY AND LIVELIHOODS

- within the human and fiscal resource capacities of COL in order to avoid “over promising and under performing”; and
- needs-based and linked to the poverty reduction strategy plans of target countries.

PRIMACY FOCUS

There was near unanimity that COL should assist policy makers in developing and implementing policies that foster the integration of literacy skills acquisition with livelihoods development initiatives.

This focus is consistent with two sub-programmes of COL’s Three-year Plan – Policy Development for Basic and Secondary Education and ODL Applications for Poverty Reduction.

The rationale for this recommendation is that literacy development programmes generally suffer from a lack of clear co-ordinating policy and that the role of literacy in development

is not well understood. Group members felt that efforts that bring policy makers from ministries of education together with those from ministries responsible for economic development are urgently needed. They expressed the view that COL is well positioned to contribute because of its current activities.

MOVING FORWARD

In order to turn these recommendations into a plan, participants outlined essential “next steps” that COL should undertake over the next year. These are:

- Validate the recommended framework
- Build on current activities
- Develop the details for the next Three-year Plan

For a more detailed report from the International Literacy and Livelihoods Experts Meeting, see the Summary Report at www.col.org/literacyandlivelihoods.

“Before I started attending computer lessons, I did not think I could do anything. Now that I know how to use a computer, I feel I can do anything.” — COLLIT participant

report cards, bank forms and government documents.

- Numeracy skills were used mostly for counting and handling money, maintaining household accounts, reading bus numbers and telling time. Learners involved in wage labour used numeracy skills for monitoring wage payments, saying that now nobody could cheat them.
- Literacy classes had the most profound effect on people over the age of 40. These people had considered themselves too old to learn, but soon realised they could learn to read, write and use technology. They gained confidence and felt more self-reliant in everyday

life. They also believed their status in the family and community increased as a result of their improved literacy.

- Many parents in the COLLIT project developed a more positive attitude towards education and became more involved in their children’s schooling. They were better able to monitor their children’s progress and started to interact more with teachers.

The COLLIT project demonstrated that the benefits of improved literacy extend far beyond reading, writing and numeracy. In fact, many of the impacts that people described had to do with everyday life and how they earn a living.

THE CURRENT REALITY OF LITERACY AND LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMES

The current state of literacy and livelihoods programmes in various regions of the Commonwealth was outlined in four keynote presentations and 16 country papers at the International Literacy and Livelihoods Experts Meeting. Several common themes emerged from these many points of view.

Growing number and diversity of providers

A diverse array of agencies and organisations are involved in literacy development programming, ranging from national governments and NGOs to churches and a growing number of private sector organisations.

Emerging national, regional and global programmes

A lack of co-ordination among various programme providers seems to be changing as illustrated by examples in the Pacific Islands, Africa and UNESCO’s global project.

Increasing linkage between literacy and development

A growing realisation that there are many “literacies” besides reading and numeracy that are essential to socio-economic development is propelling a trend toward including literacy learning opportunities in development strategies.

Increasing collaboration across sectors

The isolation of literacy education in the education sector is breaking down through involvement particularly with the health and agriculture sectors.

Increasing focus on target learners

The emerging national priorities for literacy learning are out of school youth, women and neo-literates.

Limited use of ICTs

While radio has been used creatively in many contexts for a long time, there has been little use of other ICTs. However, there is evidence that this is rapidly changing as ICT infrastructure becomes more accessible – particularly in rural areas.

Development of new conceptual frameworks

New conceptual models that offer more comprehensive definitions of literacy and which promote literacy learning as an essential ingredient in the development process are providing useful frameworks for planning more integrated literacy and livelihoods programmes.

Inter-dependent and persistent constraints

The forces constraining the progress of literacy and livelihoods development and training include lack of funding, poverty, cultural beliefs, lack of appropriate materials, low worker morale and lack of ICT infrastructure. This is the reality that challenges both policy makers and practitioners as they plan and implement literacy and livelihoods initiatives.

COL IN ACTION

DEVELOPING COL'S THREE-YEAR PLAN FOR 2006-2009

COL is holding a series of regional consultations to gather information and opinions on the programmes and activities that we should consider in our new Three-year Plan (2006-2009). Led by our Programme Director, Rod Tyrer, these consultations are also helping us to assess our current activities and regional needs.

To date, 260 people have participated in consultations held in six regions/countries and with one international organisation. Reports on those meetings are available at www.col.org/3yp06-09_consult.htm and readers of Connections are invited to send in their comments as well. Further consultations will take place in other regions and with other international organisations and donor governments.

The views from these regions will be analysed to create a comprehensive picture of needs throughout the Commonwealth in light of the contribution that open and distance learning can make to education, the fulfillment of a country's needs and contributions to achieving Millennium Development Goals. It is expected that the new Three-Year Plan will be prepared by the end of 2005.

COL's current Three-Year Plan (2003-2006) focuses on three programmes:

- Open and distance learning policy
- Open and distance learning systems development
- Open and distance learning applications

The plan integrates the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and Education for All priorities while also being guided by Commonwealth priorities. It has been implemented along with a Results Based Management (RBM) framework for planning and evaluation. www.col.org/programmes/reporting/3year_plan.htm.

EDUCATING DISTANCE EDUCATORS

Thirty-three people from seven developing Commonwealth countries have recently completed the Master of Arts in Distance Education (MADE) degree offered by India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). COL facilitated the delivery of the programme and sponsored these students under the Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme, which supports students who don't have access to such a programme due to geography, financial constraints

or family commitments in their home countries.

This is the second group of graduates in the MADE programme supported by COL. In 1997/98, 65 people from 15 countries earned their MADE degree. Since then, COL has supported IGNOU to update and internationalise the course materials. A third presentation is being planned.

Through this fellowship programme, COL is expanding the ranks of ODL experts who, in turn, will expand the breadth and quality of ODL initiatives in developing Commonwealth countries.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME GROWS

COL's Young Professionals Attachment Programme has almost doubled in size since it was introduced in 2000. The programme offers young Canadians an opportunity to gain international work experience through a six- to twelve-month attachment with a Commonwealth or international agency. This year there are 14 young professionals in 9 to 12-month placements, up from eight interns in six-month placements when the programme was introduced. The positions are with COL partners who actively employ open, distance and technology mediated learning strategies and resources to implement their programmes.

Participants are recent graduates from arts and science programmes from colleges, universities and technical institutes. This attachment provides them with their first paid, career related international experience and, most likely, their first overseas experience. Working with a variety of organisations in, or on behalf of, developing Commonwealth countries, the young professionals learn about the challenges facing the developing world and gain skills that can be transferable to other employment upon their return to Canada and/or to other international opportunities. The host organisations, in turn, have an opportunity to complete special projects.

To date, interns have found placements everywhere from Britain to Guyana, and India to New Zealand. The programme is administered by COL and funded by Foreign Affairs Canada through the Youth Employment Strategy (YES) Career Focus Program.

www.col.org/internships



PARTICIPANTS IN COL'S YOUNG PROFESSIONALS ATTACHMENT PROGRAMME

BUSINESS WRITING SKILLS FOR NGOS

In collaboration with the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation in India, COL has created a course on Writing Business English for staff at non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The materials, which help middle managers apply "plain English" principles to writing clear and succinct documents, have been pilot tested by staff at several NGOs.

The materials are available at no charge from COL. Contact Susan Phillips, Education Specialist, at sphillips@col.org.

SCIENCE, ENGLISH COURSES AVAILABLE

COL, in collaboration with eight Sub-Saharan countries, recently completed a set of modules covering the junior secondary level syllabus in Science and English. The materials, which were piloted in open schools in Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, are available on CD from COL. Partner countries report that the materials are also being used in secondary schools.

The materials are also available at no charge from COL. For more information, contact Susan Phillips, Education Specialist, at sphillips@col.org.

NETWORKING KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES IN ASIA

Asia is rich with experience and expertise, home to countries that are powerhouses in the knowledge society and the use of technologies for education and training. But it is also a region faced with massive developmental challenges, many of which can be addressed through the more intensive and effective use of innovative means of delivering education. The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) has been assisting



THE CEMCA TEAM, FROM LEFT: DALIP TETRI, CEMCA'S HEAD, ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE; BRIAN LONG, VICE-PRESIDENT, COL; USHA REDDI, DIRECTOR, CEMCA; RUKMINI VEMRAJU AND PANKAJ KHARE, PROGRAMME OFFICERS

countries and institutions to capitalise on educational media to address these challenges. It will now broaden its focus to provide even greater help.

A COL regional agency, CEMCA previously worked exclusively in the highly focused field of educational media exchange and training. After an external evaluation and extensive consultation among stakeholders, CEMCA is now moving towards becoming a regional centre for collaboration and networking in all aspects of open and distance learning (ODL). Its core activities will remain in the area of building capacity in educational media and all aspects of e-learning and computer-based delivery, through training and developing knowledge resources for wide distribution. CEMCA will now also help increase regional collaboration among those with knowledge and skills across the full range of ODL methodologies and those requiring such skills. In addition, it will continue to be a conduit for many of COL's activities, especially within India.

www.cemca.org

NEPAD E-SCHOOLS DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

COL has taken on the role of monitoring and evaluating the e-Schools Demonstration Project of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This NEPAD e-Schools Demo is gathering knowledge based on real-life experiences of the implementation of information and communications technology (ICT) in schools across Africa. It will support the introduction of a broader e-Schools Initiative that seeks to use ICT to improve the provision of education in schools. The end goal is to implement this initiative in more than half a million African schools and provide the majority of the African population with ICT skills within 20 years.

The e-Schools Initiative is an unprecedented undertaking. There are many complexities

in implementing the programme due to its being a multi-country, multi-stakeholder continental undertaking. The NEPAD e-Schools Demo is a key step in the lead up to the effective rollout of the e-Schools Initiative. The demo will take place in six schools that provide a reasonable reflection of the spectrum of African school environments.

Managing monitoring and evaluation for the demo on behalf of the NEPAD e-African Commission, COL has developed an evaluation framework and implementation plan, which is now being put into place. Next steps include developing data collection strategies, preparing reports and providing recommendations regarding the next phases of the NEPAD e-Schools project.

BUILDING A VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES

COL has invited small states to participate in the creation of a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

This initiative envisages the formation of a consortium of institutions - using appropriate information and communications technology applications - working together to plan programmes, develop content and ensure delivery of the programmes to learners. The VUSSC will cater mostly to adults, including those who may not have completed secondary school.

The invitation, sent in mid-December 2004 to education ministers and academic institutions, also requests that the national representatives indicate the results they seek to achieve for their country.

"The whole point of the VUSSC is to help these countries, which have small populations and a narrow economic base, to master learning technologies themselves and create their own locally relevant learning materials," said Sir John Daniel, President and Chief Executive Officer of COL. "They do not want to be completely dependent on imported course content."

Commonwealth education ministers conceived the idea of a VUSSC at their meeting in Halifax, Canada in 2000 when they asked COL to study the feasibility of such an institution. The focus of the initiative now is to enable small states to work together to develop courses suited to their specific needs.

SMALL ISLAND STATES EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR VUSSC

COL's Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) received support at the United Nations Small Island Developing States Network (SIDS) conference in Mauritius in January 2005.

In his keynote address to the conference, Commonwealth Secretary-General the Rt. Honourable His Excellency Don McKinnon said that the VUSSC will help bridge the learning gap in countries where education resources are limited.

And the Prime Minister of Samoa expressed his country's support of the VUSSC in his remarks to the SIDS conference.

"As small island states we need to ensure that education and training benefits of the digital technologies are made available to our countries in the same measure as they are to larger countries," said the Honourable. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa. "In order to meet that challenge we welcome the proposal for Commonwealth states towards the creation of the Virtual University for small island states. Samoa urges the Commonwealth to take this forward as a matter of priority."

Similarly, the head of the Jamaican delegation, the Honourable Dean Peart, Minister of Land and Environment, emphasised the importance of the VUSSC initiative to small states.

"COL is helping these countries to build the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth from the bottom up, starting from where each now is in its use of educational technology and advancing towards its own objectives," Sir John explained. "As common aims emerge between groups of states, either for learning content or for using particular technologies, we will be able to help them to reach their goals by facilitating collaboration and providing practical support."

Based on the response to its invitation, which has a 28 February 2005 deadline, COL hopes to determine the scope and scale of the VUSSC by identifying which states wish to participate and what each seeks to achieve. COL will then list the most widely shared objectives, both regionally and globally. Local institutions in the small states will eventually offer courses and programmes using teaching systems developed through the project. COL hopes to complete this phase by June 2005.

www.col.org/virtualu_invite.htm

PEOPLE

COL BOARD

The Government of India has named **Mr. B.S. Baswan**, Secretary, Secondary and Higher Education, Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, as its representative on COL's Board – succeeding Mr. S.C. Tripathi, who retired in August 2004. Mr. Baswan's distinguished career as a senior official in various Government of India ministries and agencies since the early 1980s has included being Secretary of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the National Commission for Minorities. He was also Director of the National Academy of Administration from 1996 to 2000. India is entitled to a seat on the Board by virtue of its status as a major donor.

The Chair of COL's Board of Governors, **Dr. Lewis Perinbam, O.C.**, has also announced the reappointment for three-year terms of three Board members, whose current term of office expired at the end of 2003.

Dr. Tara de Mel, Secretary, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, as the regional appointment for Asia.

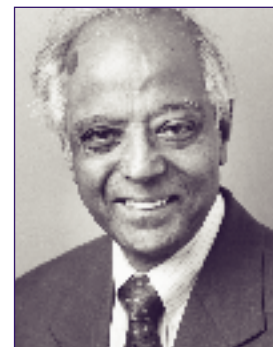
Professor Penina Mlama, Executive Director, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), as the regional appointment for Africa.

Senator, the Honourable Burchell Whiteman, Minister of Information, Jamaica, as the regional appointment for the Caribbean.

Her Excellency, Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the President of



B.S. BASWAN



LEWIS PERINBAM

Sri Lanka (who currently also holds the Education portfolios), named Dr. de Mel as Education Secretary in April 2004. She is a former Secretary, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, former Vice Chairperson (Policy), National Education Commission and, most recently, was Advisor to Her Excellency the President.

Professor Mlama is a Professor of Theatre Arts and former Head of Department, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Deputy Vice-Chancellor/Chief Academic Officer at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. With 33 chapters in in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Nairobi-based FAWE is engaged in improving access, retention and participation of girls in education in Africa (www.fawe.org).

Senator Whiteman was a long-serving Minister of Education and Culture prior to his becoming a Senator and taking on the Information portfolio.

Dr. John Rowett, the new Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities is now an advisor on COL's Board. He succeeds Dr. Michael Gibbons who retired as ACU's Secretary General in 2004.

www.acu.ac.uk

www.col.org/board

COL STAFF

Mr. Rod Tyrer has been named Programme Director. He joined COL in March 2003 on a two-year secondment from the British Department for International Development (DFID), London and was responsible for assisting in the implementation of a Results-Based Management framework for the organisation. As Programme Director, Rod's role is to ensure that COL develops appropriate and relevant triennial plans and implements the approved programme in an effective, efficient and economical manner according to the principles of Results-Based Management. www.col.org/rtyrer

Mr. Vis Naidoo was named a Finalist in the Policy category of the 2004 World Technology Awards. An Education Specialist with COL, Vis works with national ministries of education and educational institutions to support the development of ODL and ICT in education policies. As a Finalist, Vis becomes a member of the prestigious World Technology Network. The World Technology Network operates in association with NASDAQ, Microsoft, TIME Magazine and Science Magazine.

www.col.org/vnaidoo

AFTERMATH OF THE TSUNAMI CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

People and their governments the world over have come together in an unprecedented way to give support through the front-line agencies for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.

COL has contacted many of its partners in South Asia. We have been heartened to learn that some of our capacity-building initiatives with NGOs and educational institutions have been put to work effectively in support of the relief efforts. For example, community/suitcase radio stations, HAM (two-way "amateur" radio) and video production facilities have been used to commu-

nicate with and among affected communities and provide important guidance on how to avoid the spread of disease.

Full recovery will take many years. In the education sector schools must be rebuilt, replacement teachers trained and infrastructure repaired. UNICEF's school-in-a-box systems are allowing education to resume in the worst affected areas. Getting the schools functioning again is a key symbol of a return to normal life.

COL will assist in a longer-term perspective. Sadly, it takes events like these to emphasise the importance of locally based

communication. COL's Media Empowerment programme could have greater impact if governments would relax restrictions on community and HAM radio. This disaster has shown that such restrictions act against the interests of the population at times when whole communities must be mobilised.

COL is now working to extend the availability of training courses in a distance learning format on relevant topics (e.g. disaster relief, resettlement, safe water practices, post-trauma counselling). Distance education systems for teacher training (both initial and in-service) are already widely available and



ROD TYRER



VIS NAIDDO



PETER SMITH

AMERICAN EDUCATOR NAMED TO TOP UNESCO EDUCATION POST

Dr. Peter Smith, President of California State University, Monterey Bay, is the new head of education for the United Nations. Dr. Smith has accepted the position of Assistant Director-General for Education at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). He is the first American to serve in this position. Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of COL, held the post most recently.

Dr. Smith was the founder and first president of the Community College of Vermont, served as a state senator and Lieutenant Governor of Vermont and as a member of the United States House of Representatives. Prior to joining California State University, Monterey Bay upon its founding ten years ago, Dr. Smith served as Dean of the School of Education and Human Development at George Washington University in Washington, DC. He begins his new job with UNESCO on 1 July 2005.

COL CHAIR AWARDED HONORARY DOCTORATE

Dr. Lewis Perinbam, Chair of COL's Board of Governors, recently received an honorary degree (Doctor of Letters, Honoris Causa) from Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. The degree was awarded to Dr. Perinbam in recognition of his contribution to Canadian public life and his record of distinguished humanitarian service.

In his address upon receiving this, his fourth honorary doctorate, Dr. Perinbam called for "a new idealism inspired by knowledge and humility" to meet the complex and formidable challenges faced by the world today.

"You can be the architects of a more humane and just world," he told the graduating class. "You may not succeed in all that you attempt to do but do not let future generations say of you that you lacked the vision or the courage to have made the effort. In your hands lie our best hopes for the future. It is still a beautiful world."

An Officer of the Order of Canada, Dr. Perinbam has had a distinguished career in

the Canadian federal public service, in international organisations, most notably the World Bank and UNESCO, and in the non-governmental and private sectors.

www.col.org/speeches

NEW HEAD OF USP

The University of the South Pacific has announced that an international innovator in higher education, **Professor Anthony A. Tarr**, will be the University's next Vice-Chancellor.

Professor Tarr, who is widely recognised for his achievements as a senior university executive, is also an internationally acclaimed legal scholar. He is both a New Zealand and Australian national.

Professor Tarr is currently Executive Dean and Professor of Law at Indiana University in the United States. He is credited with successfully leading reforms at the University of Queensland as well as Indiana University, where he was able to substantially increase revenue streams for both those institutions.

He is expected to arrive in Suva to take up his post in June 2005.

the concept of open schooling is attracting increasing interest at the secondary level in developing countries.

Finally, like other international and Commonwealth agencies, COL has to set this tsunami disaster in the wider context of those many areas of the world where disease and hunger are still the daily experience of millions of people. Across the globe, more than 100 million children do not have access to primary education and of those who do, many are taught by poorly trained teachers in ill-equipped schools with no learning materials, laboratories

or libraries. Many may not even complete primary school. Millions of adults never received an education when they were young and are in desperate need of literacy and/or new skills in order to function in an ever-changing world.

In Africa, 6,500 people die of AIDS every day (described by British Prime Minister Tony Blair as "a man-made tsunami in Africa every week") and the disease is now spreading alarmingly in Asia.

COL's mission is to harness technology to increase the scope and scale of human learning with a special focus on extending

the use of the proven techniques of distance education. "Education and training are not a vaccine against natural disasters like this tsunami," says COL's President and CEO, Sir John Daniel, "but they are the primary means for mitigating their effects and ensuring a rapid return to normal life. Harnessing technology to education is essential if the world is to respond effectively both to natural disasters and to the larger challenge posed by widespread poverty and disease."

COL-PROTEIN PROMOTES USE OF ODL, TECHNOLOGY TO COMBAT POVERTY

COL has selected five new community education programmes that make innovative use of open and distance learning (ODL) techniques and technology and are designed to reduce rural poverty for support under its latest Poverty Reduction Outcomes through Education, Innovations and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) programme.

The proposals are from not-for-profit groups and institutions in Cameroon, India, Kenya, Nigeria and Solomon Islands. These non-governmental organisations will receive resources and materials, consultancy and expert advice from COL. They will also get financial support up to CDN \$20,000.

The main objective of COL-PROTEIN is to support projects that adopt open and distance learning and information and communications technologies (ICTs) to help build rural capacity in food security, environmental protection, rural development, nutritional education and micro-enterprise. This is the programme's third year.

"COL-PROTEIN has stimulated a number of innovative ideas from grassroots as well as national and international organisations on how ODL and ICTs can be used to address rural poverty," says Dr. Krishna Alluri, COL Education Specialist, Food Security and Environment. "With increasing access to ICT coupled with a growing body of case studies on the use of ICT to alleviate poverty, we hope to move the developing world closer to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty."

The five programmes supported by COL-PROTEIN in 2005 span a diverse range of countries and challenges.

Solar cooking lessons via telecentres in Nigeria

This initiative, submitted by the Fantsuam Foundation, plans to produce training materials on solar cooking and spread the knowledge using ICTs. It also hopes to do research on materials and methods for sharing information and knowledge via ICTs and distance learning in Africa.

Learning for fishing communities in India

From Andhra Pradesh, India, the organisation Constant Service in Developing Education and Rural Reconstruction is developing community-based distance learning for development among fisher folk. The project aims to create awareness of improved methods of fish post-harvesting technology and self-supportive women's co-operatives. The focus is on women and girls of fishing communities who stay on land while men are out deep-sea fishing.

Kitchen gardens and nutrition initiative in Kenya

This proposal was submitted by Women in the Fishing Industry Project Trust in Kisumu, Kenya. The idea is to enable women and other community members in Lake Victoria, Western Kenya, to improve their health and economic status by receiving information on good nutrition and its impact on health, establishing and maintaining kitchen gardens and making and using organic compost for their gardens.

Small business training for rural women in Cameroon

This initiative, brought forward by Protégé QV, aims to help rural women in the Upper Nkam Division develop new skills and start micro-enterprises. The idea is to demonstrate that the use of radio and cell phones using short message service (SMS) would enable rural women in Cameroon to learn and develop new skills, prompting them to move from a survivalist mentality and engage themselves professionally in a micro-enterprise.

Computer skills coaching in the Solomon Islands

The Rural Development Volunteer Association of Honiara, Solomon Islands, is developing a project for the coaching of rural trainers. The main aim of the project is to strengthen the Youth First Computer Centre, an existing ICT resource and learning centre for young people.

WHAT QUALIFIES?

COL-PROTEIN provides start-up, limited-term support to qualifying projects in the developing Commonwealth. The focus is on innovative uses of ODL to address poverty in rural areas. In particular, COL-PROTEIN seeks to support initiatives that will adopt ODL and information and communication technologies (ICT) to help build rural capacity under the following areas:

- Food security
- Environmental protection
- Rural development
- Nutritional education
- Micro-enterprise

Activities that are considered for support include:

- Innovative models that use ODL and ICT
- Self-learning materials and their piloting
- Detailed content design that can be ICT-enabled and would benefit the rural poor

Proposals are solicited each year for a September deadline with notification to approved projects in November and commencement of the projects in December for one year. For more details about qualifying organisations and the application process, go to www.col.org/protein or write to info@col.org.

STOCKHOLM CHALLENGE AWARD RECOGNISES COL-PROTEIN PROJECT

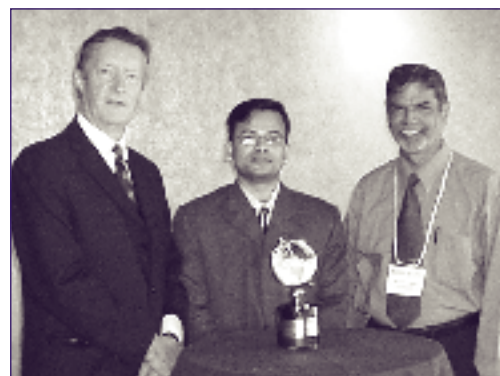
A project funded by COL-PROTEIN has received international acclaim. The Mobile Internet-Educational Unit on Boats (MIEUB) project in Bangladesh was named a finalist in the Environment category of the 2004 Stockholm Challenge Awards. The prestigious awards recognise organisations and individuals who use ICT to improve living conditions in developing countries.

This innovative project in Bangladesh, developed by the voluntary NGO Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha, educates farmers in remote areas about important environmental and health issues as it travels down waterways. Funding from COL-PROTEIN enabled the start-up of this programme in 2003. This award is significant because it provides international recognition and promotion. Already there have been a number of groups who have expressed interest in replicating the Mobile Internet-Educational Unit on Boats initiative in other developing countries.



The MIEUB project has also received honours from other groups recently. It was the winner of the Global Junior Challenge Award 2004. This global award is promoted by the Digital Youth Consortium, a non-profit organisation founded by the Municipality of Rome and six major ICT companies. It recognises best practices on the use of new technologies in education and training. The MIEUB project was also awarded a Tech Museum Award in the Environment category. Organised by the United Nations Development Programme, The World Bank Institute and Santa Clara University, the 2004 Tech Awards honoured 25 laureates for their pioneering work in developing technology for the benefit of humanity.

For more on MIEUB, please see "Linking literacy developments and livelihoods in Bangladesh" on page 2.



ABUL HASANAT MOHAMMED REZWAN (CENTRE), EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SHIDHULAI SWANIRVAR SANGSTHA, BANGLADESH, WITH THE 2004 TECH MUSEUM AWARD, COL'S PRESIDENT, SIR JOHN DANIEL (LEFT) AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST, KRISHNA ALLURI

FROM COL'S PARTNERS

CARIBBEAN ODL ASSOCIATION LAUNCHED

A new organisation has been created to promote distance education in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning (CARADOL) held its first meeting at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica in March 2004.

CARADOL is receiving financial and organisational support from the UWI-UNESCO Caribbean Universities Project for Integrated Distance Education, a project aimed at improving access to universities in the Caribbean through information and communication technologies (ICT). The new organisation is focused on developing a learning society in the Caribbean through equity and access to education. www.cupide.org.jm

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA OFFERS DIPLOMA IN YOUTH

The Commonwealth Secretariat has assigned the University of Ghana, Legon, to run a distance education programme for Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia under its two-year Diploma in Youth Programme. The first two classes of almost 70 students graduated in 2004.

Introduced in 1971 by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Diploma in Youth Programme provides training for youth workers in Commonwealth African countries. It became a distance programme in 1998.

INDIAN EDUCATION BROADCASTING SERVICE GOES NATION-WIDE

The Doordarshan Direct-To-Home (DTH) television service has been launched in India, extending the national education broadcasting service's reach to all regions of the country. Previously, the Doordarshan was unable to reach ten percent of India.

While there are other DTH satellite television services in the country, the Doordarshan DTH service does not have a monthly subscription. Users pay only for a set-top box and a dish antenna.

V.S. PRASAD (LEFT), DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION COUNCIL (NAAC); PROFESSOR RAM TAKWALE (CENTRE), CHAIRPERSON, NAAC GENERAL COUNCIL AND COL'S SIR JOHN DANIEL SIGN A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING



MICROSOFT AND UNESCO SIGN ICT AGREEMENT

Microsoft Corp. and UNESCO recently announced a co-operation agreement that will increase access to ICTs and ICT skills training in underserved communities. Under the alliance, UNESCO and Microsoft will collaborate on programmes that focus on the specific needs of developing countries. The goal: to remove barriers to digital inclusion and enable people around the world to realise the full potential of technology.

Some of the projects resulting from this alliance include:

- *Syllabus for integrating ICT curriculum into teaching:* With assistance from Microsoft, UNESCO will create resource materials to encourage the use of ICTs in classrooms.
- *UNESCO Knowledge Communities:* Using the Microsoft Solutions Sharing Network platform, UNESCO will develop online communities that allow international and national experts and agencies to exchange content and share tools, best practices and information.
- *Teacher support and knowledge sharing:* The partners will explore how Microsoft's Innovative Teacher's programme and its online community can further UNESCO's aims.
- *ICT access and skills training for teachers and students:* UNESCO and Microsoft will explore opportunities to collaborate under Microsoft's Partners in Learning initiative.
- *Youth technology and learning centres in the North African Arab states:* The partners are establishing a technology centre that will provide North African youth with improved access to ICT and ICT skills development.

- *Computer refurbishment:* The two organisations will collaborate to help developing countries increase access to cost-effective computer technology by finding ways to refurbish computers.
- *Local language development:* UNESCO will provide consultation to Microsoft and support the company's efforts with local governments to prioritise and expand the number of languages served by its Local Language Program.

FOCUS ON QUALITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

COL and India's National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) are jointly taking up initiatives for quality assurance in higher education with specific focus on teacher education. During his visit to South Asia in November 2004, COL's President and CEO, Sir John Daniel, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NAAC for COL to develop quality indicators in teacher training and also share best practices in the field followed by other Commonwealth countries. Professor V.S. Prasad signed the MOU on behalf of NAAC.

The agreement is aimed at improving the quality of teacher training institutes in the country, Sir John said. "About 30 million new teachers are needed in the next 10 years. It is important to ensure that they are of high quality."

Sir John also inaugurated a joint workshop on "Quality Indicators in Teacher Education". The workshop involved 20 experts from eight countries, including Botswana, Namibia, Nigeria, Mauritius, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the UK and India. The draft indicators prepared in the workshop will be further discussed and developed into a set of indicators for assessing teacher education institutions in the Commonwealth.

A collection of papers presented in the Roundtable on Quality Assurance held in



PARTICIPANTS
AT THE FIRST
MEETING OF THE
SOUTH ASIAN
CONSORTIUM
FOR TEACHER
EDUCATION AND
DEVELOPMENT
(SACTED) IN
COLOMBO,
NOVEMBER 2004

March 2004 was released during the workshop. This is a joint publication of NAAC and COL and contains best practices and innovations in quality assurance in teacher education in South Asia and Africa.

SOUTH ASIAN TEACHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM CREATED

One of the main ways COL facilitates linkages and networking among organisations is by supporting the creation of regional consortia in a specific area, such as the South Asian Consortium for Teacher Education and Development (SACTED), which was launched in Colombo on 3 November 2004.

The first meeting of the SACTED was attended by 22 participants from Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who determined that SACTED will be a consortium of institutions involved in teacher training and teacher development including training/development of all personnel in the education system and teacher educators.

The following institutions volunteered to be the nodal institution in each of the five countries:

- Bangladesh Open University - Bangladesh
- National Council for Teacher Education - India
- Centre for Open Learning, Maldives College of Higher Education, Ministry of Education - Maldives
- Allama Iqbal Open University - Pakistan
- The Open University of Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka

SACTED will be based at one of these five institutions for rotating two-year terms, starting with India's National Council for Teacher Education. An Action Plan for 2005-2006 will be finalised at the first meeting of the Advisory Committee scheduled for January 2005.

NIGERIA CREATES COMMITTEE ON DISTANCE LEARNING

The Government of Nigeria has created a National Open and Distance Education Committee to encourage the use of education to uplift the quality of life of its citizens. The committee is headed by the Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Education, Mallam Ibrahim Talba and also includes representatives from government, educational organisations, teachers groups, ODL providers and technology providers.

The committee is focused on four initiatives:

- Drawing up a code of practice for overseas and local providers of ODL
- Determining the benchmarks for quality assurance and its applications
- Developing guidelines to check the proliferation of ODL certificates
- Proposing strategies to strengthen collaboration and partnerships that offer support for ODL in Nigeria

OUSL OFFERS INTERNATIONAL MATE

The Master of Arts in Teacher Education (MATE) programme provided by the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is now being offered to other countries in Asia and Africa for the professional development of teacher educators. This is the first offshore programme that OUSL has offered in its 25-year existence.

COL facilitated the internationalisation of the MATE programme at the request of the Office of the President of Sri Lanka in early 2003. Under COL's leadership, the curriculum was restructured and the course was designed to incorporate scenario-based

learning. Professor Som Naidu of the University of Melbourne worked with design experts in OUSL's Faculty of Education to develop six study guides, which are the core learning components for the six modules of the MATE.

Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of COL, launched the MATE-International course in Colombo on 3 November 2004. The session was chaired by Professor Uma Coomaraswamy, Vice-Chancellor, OUSL. COL Board member, Ms. Tara de Mel, Education Secretary, Government of Sri Lanka, was the guest of honour. Enrolment for the pilot run of the course began in January 2005.

OPEN U FOR SINGAPORE

Singapore's Minister for Education, The Honourable Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, has announced that the country will have an open university offering degrees in its own name in 2006.

"The open university will provide greater opportunities for working adults who are keen to acquire new skills and knowledge, as well as attain higher educational qualifications," he said. In a statement issued in January 2005, Minister Shanmugaratnam also told Singaporeans that the Government will be providing more local university placements for them and would be encouraging reputable private universities to provide a wider choice of university education beyond the state-funded sector.

www.moe.gov.sg

OPPORTUNITY AT ANNA UNIVERSITY

Anna University in the city of Chennai (formerly Madras), India is offering an opportunity for an attachment for someone who could work with the university in its planning and development in the fields of computer-aided design/manufacturing and in environmental science. This is not a paid position, but the university can offer accommodation at their International Guest House at nominal charges. Please contact the Vice Chancellor's office directly to learn more.

vc@annauniv.edu
www.annauniv.edu

EVENTS

CADE 2005

COL is a one of the sponsors of the 2005 conference of the Canadian Association for Distance Education. CADE 2005 will be hosted in Vancouver, Canada, by the Centre for Online and Distance Education at Simon Fraser University. It will take place from 7 to 11 May 2005.

www.cade2005.ca

INSTITUTE SHARES OPEN SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

COL and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India hosted a two-week Institute on Open Schooling for senior educators from Africa and the South Pacific from 23 August to 3 September 2004. The 14 participants were from Malawi, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The programme provided delegates with the opportunity to gain experience with the operational processes of an open school. During visits to study centres and NGOs, the delegates interacted with open schooling field practitioners and learned how NIOS shares expertise and resources with other institutions. The delegates also shared status reports on open and distance learning (ODL) in their respective countries. By seeing firsthand how NIOS functions and sharing information, the educators will be better able to establish or enhance open schooling in their countries.



INSTITUTE ON OPEN SCHOOLING: DELEGATES VISIT TAJ MAHAL



DELEGATES AT COL-SINGAPORE JOINT MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Institute is one of many collaborative activities between COL and NIOS. This was the third time that NIOS has hosted visitors from developing countries of the Commonwealth, and a fourth institute is planned for later this year. As a leader in open schooling, NIOS is well positioned to share its experience in providing open and distance learning.

CAMBRIDGE ODL CONFERENCE

“Reflective practice in open and distance learning: how do we improve” is the theme of the 11th Cambridge Conference on Open and Distance Learning, to be held 20 September to 23 September 2005 in Cambridge, UK. The conference is co-sponsored by COL.

Organisers welcome contributions and papers on themes such as:

- How can reflective practice impact on the learning organisation?
- Who sponsors evaluation and why?
- How does reflective practice inform quality and research?
- How does one learn to be a reflective practitioner?

The deadline for submission of papers is 1 May 2005 and for registration 1 June 2005.

In keeping with previous Cambridge conferences, there will be ample opportunity for delegates to meet in small groups and develop their own reflective practice.

www2.open.ac.uk/r06/conference/conference.htm

BOTSWANA HOSTS OPEN SCHOOLING FORUM

COL collaborated with the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) and the South African Research and Distance Education Centre (SARDEC) to support and host a Forum on Open Schooling at the Secondary Level in October 2004. More than 40 people from 14 Sub-Saharan countries attended the meeting, along with experts from the United Kingdom and India.

The forum included presentations by many participants about open schooling at the secondary level in their countries such as the Interactive Radio Instruction initiative in Zambia, the National Institute of Open Schooling in India and SchoolNet, Nigeria. Opportunities to discuss major issues with respect to the open/distance delivery of school level education were provided during the four-day event. Participants also received documented case studies that reflected the different types of open schools in existence.

The forum was the first activity hosted by SARDEC, a new regional centre for open learning situated at BOCODOL. The centre is supported by COL and other partners.

COL-SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of COL presented certificates in the concluding session of the fourth COL-Singapore Joint Management Development Institute held in Singapore from 18-29 October 2005.

Twenty heads of teacher education colleges and institutes from 12 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, five of them women, participated in the Institute held at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological



RESOURCE PERSONS AND PARTICIPANTS AT THE NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION IN HYDERABAD, INDIA

University, Singapore. NIE provided all academic and professional support. Dr. Moo Swee Ngoh, Associate Professor from NIE was the Director of the Programme.

Academics from NIE presented sessions on teacher training, curriculum and education management with special focus on the Singapore experience. Professor Mohan Menon, Education Specialist, Teacher Training with COL coordinated the country presentations and organised sessions in course development and learner support systems in the context of teacher training and development. Participants also visited several institutions including schools, polytechnics and technical training institutes. Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported in-country expenses and managed the logistics of the Institute.

In his meeting with Professor Leo Tan, Director of NIE, Sir John Daniel noted the successful organisation of the Joint Institute for four years and discussed the possibility of further joint activities by the two agencies.

CARIBBEAN TOURISM INDUSTRY AND E-LEARNING

Curriculum specialists and tourism educators from across the Caribbean took part in a virtual workshop to learn about developing online learning programmes. The 40-hour virtual workshop, "ATutor Course Development and Delivery" was hosted by the Caribbean Tourism Organization/Caribbean Tourism Human Resource Council, working in partnership with COL.

The workshop attracted approximately 25 educators from training institutes and colleges across the Caribbean. The plan is to use the skills of workshop participants to develop an online course in Sustainable Tourism in 2005, as well as other online courses. This collaboration between the Caribbean Tourism Organization and COL is expected to reap benefits

for Caribbean students in the long term by providing greater access to courses in tourism and hospitality throughout the region through online delivery.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

The quality of research methodology for distance education should be stepped up in proportion to the revolutionary technology that is available due to the launch of Edusat, said the Vice-Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, Professor H.P. Dikshit.

Delivering the inaugural address at the five-day National Workshop on Research Methodology for Distance Education, Professor Dikshit said a new era has begun with the launch of Edusat. The Edusat satellite system provides "education on demand" for classrooms, regional learning centres, homes and workplaces. Massive futuristic research is required to improve the quality of distance education, Professor Dikshit said. With eight to 10 national networks giving Edusat coverage and with transmission and bandwidth connectivity in place, distance educators are facing enormous challenges in updating course content.

The workshop, sponsored by COL, was held in December 2004 at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University in Hyderabad. It trained 31 educators from various open universities and distance education centres of conventional universities to become trainers in research and evaluation techniques.

A growing proportion of higher education participants are involved in distance education in India, according to Professor Asha Kanwar, Education Specialist, Higher Education with COL. It's estimated that by 2010, 40% of people involved in higher education will be pursuing studies through open and distance

learning (ODL). This means Edusat will require a great deal of course content based on quality research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN ODL WORKSHOP

A workshop on Research Methodology in ODL for mid-career Indian academics organised in partnership with the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU), Hyderabad was held from 6-10 December 2004 at the G. Ram Reddy Research Academy of Distance Education (GRADE), BRAOU, Hyderabad. The workshop was designed in consultation with a group of international experts during the third Pan-Commonwealth Forum held in Dunedin in July 2004 and was the first of its kind organised by any ODL institution in India. The Practitioner Research and Evaluation Skills Training materials (PREST, see New Resources, page 14) were used as the primary resource for the workshop.

Thirty-one academics from 16 universities/institutions in eight states of India participated. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) Vice Chancellor, Professor H.P. Dikshit gave the Inaugural Address and the Vice Chancellor of BRAOU, Professor D. Ram Chandram delivered the Valedictory speech. The resource persons included Professor S. Panda, IGNOU; Professor V. Venkaiah and Professor Pushpa Ramakrishna, BRAOU; Professor Olu Jegede, Vice Chancellor, National Open University of Nigeria; Professor B.N. Koul, former Pro-Vice Chancellor, IGNOU; Professor G.K. Mitra, Fellow, Centre for Economics and Social Studies; Professor S.N.N. Pandit, former IIT professor and Dr. Asha Kanwar, Education Specialist, Higher Education, COL.

NEW RESOURCES

COL PUBLICATIONS

Perspectives on Distance Education: Emerging Trends in the Development of School Networking Initiatives

Vis Naidoo and Heba Ramzy, Editors.
137 pages.

This collection of research and case studies provides snapshots of developments in school networking in seven regions of the world.

Recent developments in computers and Internet-related technologies, and their application to education and training, have increasingly allowed learners to access information and knowledge from each other and from different sources.

In the developing world, access to technology and information can be difficult, but school networking has begun to support the attainment of quality education at both the primary and secondary levels of education.

This book focuses on the variety of school networking models that have emerged in different regions and the resulting trends and issues that need to be considered in terms of supporting the learning, teaching, management and teacher training processes.

Both policy-makers and educators will find this book useful.

Emerging Trends in the Development of School Networking Initiatives is fully available online at www.col.org/PSemerging or can be ordered through COL's distribution agents: Government Publication Services, Queen's Printer, Attn. COL Customer Service, PO Box 9452 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, BC V8W 9V7 Canada; tel: 250.387.6409; fax: 250.387.1120; e-mail: QPPublications@gems5.gov.bc.ca. Orders can be placed online at www.publications.gov.bc.ca

Government agencies and institutions in developing Commonwealth countries may receive copies at no charge. Nominal charges apply to orders from developed, newly developed and non-Commonwealth countries — usually CDN\$12.00 plus shipping. These orders must be accompanied by pre-payment or charged to VISA or MasterCard accounts.

www.col.org/PSemerging

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH AND EVALUATION SKILLS TRAINING

The PREST training resources provide open and distance learning (ODL) practitioners with convenient access to basic knowledge on how to conduct research and evaluation in their everyday work. PREST fills a gap for practical, first-rung research and evaluation skills training and provides a strong foundation for progress to higher-level research programmes and qualifications.

Written for ODL practitioners by ODL practitioners, the interactive materials aim to develop practical skills through research tasks that draw on research and evaluation methods from education and social science, but use illustrative examples from international ODL contexts.

The PREST materials are designed as self-study resources that can also be used by training providers in a variety of contexts. Six "Core Modules" provide a foundation in research and evaluation methods explored within ODL contexts for inexperienced researchers. Each Module contains 20 to 40 reading hours, plus several activities. The topics are:

- Doing educational research and evaluation in ODL (an introduction);
- Planning research and evaluation;
- Getting and analysing quantitative data;
- Getting and analysing qualitative data;
- Mixed research methods; and
- Reporting on research and evaluation to support or influence change.

The series also includes six Handbooks, which are guides to conducting research and evaluation in a particular field of ODL. Each Handbook contains 20 reading hours, plus several activities. The topics are:

- Using programme monitoring in research and evaluation,
- Measuring outcomes;
- Cost and economics of open and distance learning;
- Programme evaluation and its role in quality assurance;
- Researching marginalised and disadvantaged learners; and
- Researching tutoring and learner support.

The PREST series is published by COL in collaboration with the International Research Foundation for Open Learning. The materials are freely available online through Acrobat PDF downloads.

www.col.org/prest

CONSULTANTS' REPORTS

ICT and Literacy: Who Benefits? Experiences from Zambia and India

Edited by Dr. Glen Farrell

This report on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in providing literacy education programmes is based on a three-and-a-half year pilot project that COL initiated in selected communities in India and Zambia. The project was funded by the UK Department for International Development in collaboration with country partners.

While the use of ICTs in other education sectors is developing quickly, applications in the context of non-formal literacy programmes is relatively new. This report is a chronicle of lessons learned through the pilot programme and provides interesting insights into how ICTs can enhance the provision of literacy education.

Towards a Strategy on Developing African Teacher Capabilities in the Use of Information and Communication Technology

This study was commissioned by SchoolNet Africa (SNA) in partnership with COL, the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) and the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA). It is the most extensive examination to date of teacher training in ICT in African countries at both the pre-service and in-service levels.

Through documentary review, interviews and discussions with a broad range of stakeholders and service providers involved in the field of ICT training for African teachers, this report has identified and listed as many of the ICT courses and programmes available to African teachers as possible. A broad range of these courses and programmes has been evaluated in more detail in order to highlight the obstacles and challenges to ICT integration in teacher training in Africa. This has informed some recommendations for strategic interventions at a national level to aid in moving forward with ICT integration by and for African teachers.

www.col.org/consultancies

CORRECTION: In the feature on COL's Excellence in Distance Education Awards in the September 2004 issue of *Connections*, the Award of Excellence for Distance Education Materials was accepted by Professor Les Eastcott, Vice Chancellor, University of Papua New Guinea, not Dr. Thomas Webster. We sincerely apologise to Professor Eastcott and Dr. Webster for the error.



TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE DISABLED

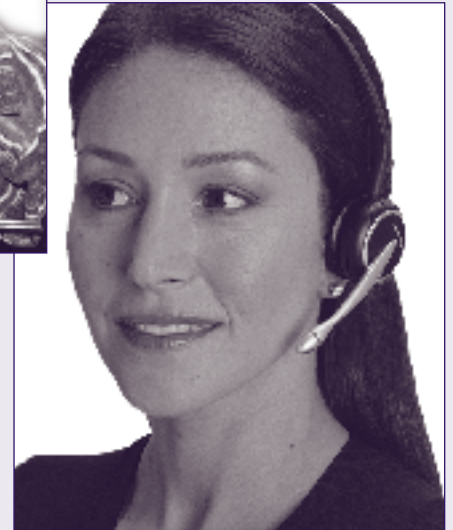
The attraction to distance education among the disabled population is likely similar to those of the typical learner – distance education fulfils a desire to pursue flexible professional development and/or accreditation. People with disabilities are benefiting from great strides in innovation, including technologies associated with distance education. With ongoing improvements in adaptive technologies, there are more tools that enhance learning for the disabled. In countries such as the United States and Canada, educational institutions may apply for special needs funding to procure goods and improve services for students with special needs.

In fact, an instructor at The Rochester Institute of Technology used computer conferencing and email over a decade ago. Norman Coombs commented that these technologies “permitted a blind teacher to communicate written material with seeing students and have also facilitated his interactions with the hearing impaired without requiring the services of an interpreter”.

Assistive technologies such as voice synthesizers, voice recognition devices, compact high-resolution screens and EZ Access Protocols are enabling people with disabilities to communicate and access information. By following Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, web developers are adhering to universal design principles and contributing to a growing body of online resources for people with disabilities.

Despite increasing awareness about technology issues, disabled learners continue to battle many accessibility challenges that the majority of learners do not. In the paper “Issues in Accessing Distance Education Technologies for Individuals with Disabilities”, the authors identify three main issues:

- direct accessibility of hardware and software;
- accessibility of content presentation and use; and
- education of those who use the technology.



The findings from a research study on students with disabilities in distance education conducted by Susan Moisey at Athabasca University (Canada) leads her to conclude that “there is little doubt that distance education can enhance access to students with disabilities and that disability-specific support services can enhance success”.

Source and further references:
www.developmentgateway.org/e-learning.

COL ESTABLISHES A LEARNING OBJECT REPOSITORY

COL has launched an online database of learning content that provides software to Commonwealth countries free of charge. Institutions or governments can establish a shared repository by accessing free open source software from COL’s Learning Object Repository (LOR).

A number of online databases of learning content – or Learning Object Repositories – have been created around the world including CAREO, MERLOT and EdNA. COL has worked with eduSource and CANARIE (a not-for-profit corporation for advanced Internet development supported by its members, project partners and the Canadian Government) to develop the necessary tools, standards and protocols. The partners invested more than CDN \$8 million in this venture. The software produced by this consortium

has been made available in COL’s Learning Object Repository under a free open source software license.

Vancouver-based 3waynet Inc. developed complementary open source software that, when used together, could provide a fully functioning repository. In co-operation with COL, 3waynet created all the programming “connective tissue” to make these systems work together and provide an easy-to-use web page to access content.

The system includes the ability to add information about the learning material (“learning objects”) with “meta tags”. These are IMS-compatible (IMS Schema 1.2.2) and the system is able to “federate-search” other repositories when the user is looking for learning materials. Installed on a local or shared server, this will enable course developers to



locate learning materials along with the necessary copyright information from multiple continents.

COL is hosting the software and is collaborating with the African Virtual University, headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, that will upload and make available open source courseware that Commonwealth countries can access free of charge. COL anticipates partnering with other groups as awareness of the LOR grows. For more details, go to www.col.org/lor or contact Paul West, Knowledge Manager and Education Specialist at pwest@col.org.

WEBLOGS OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING, SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE

The “blogosphere” is a continuously expanding, global forum for virtual discussion, debate and knowledge sharing. There were approximately 2.4 to 2.9 million active weblogs as of June 2003, according to the on-line source, ClickZ Stats. No doubt this has grown significantly since then. Weblogs have become a vehicle to ruminate on a wide range of subjects, from e-learning to politics.

Weblogs have many upsides including scalability and flexibility. They are relatively easy to create and maintain, as they do not require the writer to have advanced web publishing skills or a web administrator on hand. Similar to hard-copy diaries, weblog entries, often posted through e-mail, are chronological but are archived in reverse date order. Depending on the type of platform used, writers may also publish links to their papers, post photographs, provide audio content and include hyperlinks

to other interesting resources on the Web. There are numerous commercial platforms for creating weblogs, including: Tblog, Blogger, Typepad, and Squarespace. The same companies will also host weblogs either free or for a subscription fee.

Weblogs can be powerful tools for promoting and developing literacy, as well as basic publishing skills. The weblog is often a beehive of activity as entries made by one writer may in turn be read and responded to by dozens of others. Classroom weblogs are being used for collaborative group learning. For example, one group of learners pose questions while another group provide feedback. Aside from teaching reading and writing skills, blogging assists learners to construct new knowledge through self-expression and interaction with their peers.



Weblogs are also perceived as an enabler for assembling and archiving knowledge within the community of practice. Despite being a relatively new communication and collaboration tool, weblogs are winning over decision makers and practitioners in the education world. In 2003, Harvard University created the Blogs at Harvard Initiative in order to digitise and integrate different departments and schools within the institution.

Source and further references:
www.developmentgateway.org.

HOW LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS WORK

The learning management system (LMS) is the online environment in which students can read study material, share information with other students, chat online with classmates and submit assignments. These programmes, such as WebCT and ATutor, have a fairly standard suite of tools. The more expensive ones have a number of bells and whistles, many of which institutions don't really use.

The course material that is used within a learning management system is normally created by course authoring or assembly tools. One may create course material in a tool as simple as Microsoft Word, Netscape Composer or Microsoft FrontPage. The contents may also be created in a learning content management system (LCMS). The more modern learning management systems incorporate both LCMS and LMS in the same programme. For example, both ATutor and WebCT are both LMSs and LCMSs.

Since the LMS will be changed from time to time by the institution, depending on the costs and features of the products available to it, it is better to assemble the course material outside an LMS or LCMS. The content is then uploaded to a learning object repository (LOR), which stores all the individual pieces of the courseware (learning objects).

When time comes to deploy the learning objects in a formal course, the institution or person offering the programme may, at that

stage, decide which LMS they wish to use, download the objects from the learning object repository and import them into the LMS. There may be a need for further formatting to ensure that the learning objects appear in good shape in the LMS.

Once the course material has been placed into the LMS, the participants are registered on the system. The registration of these participants on the LMS should not be confused with their registration in the student administration of a university. The university's student administration system takes into account many other aspects that a LMS does not need to worry about, such as the accounts payable and long-term academic record. In the interests of integration, it would be ideal to have the institution's learning management system sharing information with the institution's student administration system. The programmes to make this happen usually have to be written specifically for the institution and depend on the software that is used on both sides (LMS and student administration system).

Most LMSs have the ability to provide assessment of students by way of multiple-choice questions and submission of assignments. If more advanced testing is required, more specifically designed assessment engines might be required to supplement the ability of the LMS.

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