

Connections



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Nigeria resumes place as major contributor to COL

Following Nigeria's three-year pledge at last year's Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (Halifax, Canada), COL has now received a first contribution of about CDN\$500,000 for the current financial year. Consequently, Nigeria has resumed its place as a major financial contributor to COL, which it was when COL was created by Heads of Government in 1987. The officers and Board of Governors of COL are grateful to Nigeria for its generosity and for its confidence in COL.

After four years of suspension, Nigeria returned to full membership status within the Commonwealth in May 1999, when Obasanjo was sworn into office after being elected as President.

COL assists Nigeria in restoring distance education

At the invitation of the Nigerian Ministry of Education, COL President and CEO, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, headed a delegation to start the process of assisting Nigeria to reintroduce and reinvigorate distance-learning options in its education system. Such provisions had been abolished by Nigeria's military government in 1994.

Nigeria's President, His Excellency General Olusegun Obasanjo, warmly welcomed the delegation and declared his Government's commitment to distance education, in support of the country's basic education programme as well as in further education. He stated that education comes next to food security in his Government's priorities. "We want you to be part of the solution to our problems," he said. Professor Dhanarajan assured the President that COL would respond to Nigeria's request, using the resources that it has and can make available, and that COL is committed to helping the country with distance learning initiatives including the necessary teacher training.

The long-established National Teachers' Institute and the proposed national open university will play major roles in the transformation.

Education Minister, The Honourable Professor Babalola Borishade, said that a Government Bill on distance education would be presented to the National Assembly and that associated funding would be provided in the 2002 budget.



CENTRE: MINISTER OF STATE RITA VERMA; CENTRE RIGHT: COL CHAIRMAN IAN MACDONALD

COL Board meets in New Delhi

COL is to distance education what UNESCO is to the formal education system – a generator of ideas, a midwife to new technologies and finally a space where all can come together in building the education of tomorrow.

PROFESSOR RITA VERMA,
MINISTER OF STATE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, INDIA,
ADDRESSING COL'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS IN NOVEMBER 2001

India's Minister of State for Human Resource Development, The Honourable Professor Rita Verma, stated that "COL is to distance education what UNESCO is to the formal education system" as she inaugurated the 18th meeting of COL's Board of Governors in New Delhi in November 2001. She confirmed India's continuing support for COL, noted that "capacity building" was one of the principal objectives in the organisation's current three-year plan and pointed out India's almost unique position as both a significant donor to and recipient of COL's efforts. "I hope it will be possible for you to use the services of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (INGOU) system in this capacity building exercise more extensively, particularly in the geographically and culturally contiguous Afro-Asian region," she said. She noted that India's education system and IGNOU have been recognised as leading examples for not only developing, but developed countries as well. "It is remarkable that the gender gap in literacy is narrowing and so is the urban-rural gap. There is [also] significant progress in some of our educationally backward regions. Social transformation implemented by democratic means (this often forgotten) is

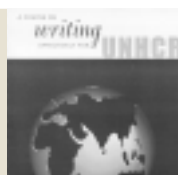
continued on page 2



KNOWLEDGE
SERIES
2



COL HAS A
NEW LOOK!
3



COL/UNHCR
WIN AWARD
8



ED-TECH
NEWS
11

COL IN ACTION...3

COL PARTNERS...5

PEOPLE...7

EVENTS...9



SIX NEW TITLES ARE NOW AVAILABLE: ONLINE LEARNING, COMMUNITY RADIO, COSTING, AUDIO/AUDIOCONFERENCING, VIDEO/VIDEOCONFERENCING AND TELECENTRES

COL publishes second set of Knowledge Series titles

The Knowledge Series is designed as a succinct, topic-by-topic overview of distance education practice and delivery.

The need for a distance alternative

Distance education has burgeoned from a limited niche market into a potentially lucrative and even necessary growth venture for many, in a rapidly changing educational landscape. Educators who have kept up to speed in the field of distance learning are aware that throughout the past decade, learning by distance has benefited from pedagogical developments and advances in information and communication technology. Distance education is now a potentially faster, more effective and efficient process than its predecessor, learning by correspondence, and an increasingly attractive option for learners — especially those unwilling or unable to afford full time formal study, or to relocate to a remote location.

Today's global economy demands lifelong learning and skills upgrading from its human capital; subsequently, those clamouring for an education, whether basic, higher or vocational, have increased in number — surpassing the ability of formal academic channels, many already at capacity, to respond to today's educational needs. Other education deliverers, notably professional associations, community organisations and NGOs, are also beginning to offer programmes for distance delivery.

Catching up to distance options

Many institutions that are not currently engaged in distance learning efforts are now recognising the need to do so and others may seek to upgrade old-tech distance delivery methods, or expand their programme's capacity and outreach. Start-ups will need to smooth out pedagogical, technical and administrative kinks.

And where does one begin? Distance learning options now encompass the education spectrum, with course offerings from basic literacy to legislative drafting. The medium for the message varies from humble radio transmissions, in conjunction with print and other visual aids, to sophisticated 3D-modelling programmes for online courses. Those given the challenge of developing, teaching or administering a distance programme are often conventionally-trained academic practitioners and administrators with their hearts in the right place, but with little direct experience in distance delivery and practice. These educators, trainers and managers initially need an idea of the "what" and "how" of distance learning, without having to invest a lot of time or money in too much detail at too early a stage.

COL's Knowledge Series

Instead of trying to assimilate the large body of distance education material available in short order, you could pick up a copy (or two or three) of COL's Knowledge Series. The expert-authored, ongoing series is a succinct, topic-by-topic overview of distance education theory and practice. With a reader-friendly approach, Knowledge Series titles are limited to six pages each, with print versions presented in a foldout format.

First published in November 2000, the series has already profiled editing, support groups, instructional design, multimedia and managing for electronic networking. Each title includes a bibliography and a further reading list. About five guides, reflecting the most topical developments in distance learning, are published annually.

The 2001 titles include online learning, community radio, costing, audio/audioconferencing, video/videoconferencing and telecentres.

The Knowledge Series is aimed at education professionals relatively new to distance education, with content just detailed enough for introductory use by and for trainers — whether educational, vocational or corporate. Single copies of Knowledge Series titles are available at no charge, with the proviso that the contents are used or reproduced for non-commercial purposes and with acknowledgement to the author and to COL. The titles are downloadable from the COL web site (www.col.org/knowledge) and can be ordered individually in print, or as a complete set on CD-ROM. The Knowledge Series is also generally available through COL-affiliated projects and institutions.

COL initiated the Knowledge Series in 1999. Topics are selected from a shortlist, revised annually, of the most frequent distance education-related queries COL receives. Although not created from a specifically expressed need, the Series is a response to COL's work in the field. Dave Wilson, COL Communications Manager, oversees the project together with an editor on contract to COL and an in-house graphic designer.

For the series' 2000 publication start, potential authors were identified in consultation with COL's on-staff education specialists. Authorship of the six 2001 titles resulted from a Commonwealth-wide call for submissions to education organisations networked with COL.

Hundreds of each title have been downloaded from the COL web site to date, a few thousand copies in total, and COL has received several favourable comments. Organisations that have requested print versions, or that have profiled the series as an item of note, include educational institutions, NGOs and e-publications throughout the world.

BOARD continued from page 1

necessarily time consuming, but the good results are coming in ... Children and their parents will now be both part of the learning environment, synergistically linked."

The COL Board met in New Delhi at the invitation of the Indira Gandhi National Open University and the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia. Human Resource Development Minister, The Honourable Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, also hosted a dinner for Board members.

NEW MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS — SEE PEOPLE, PAGE 7.

OTHER MEETINGS HELD IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE BOARD MEETING IN DELHI — SEE EVENTS PAGE 9.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE KNOWLEDGE SERIES CAN BE ACCESSED ON THE COL WEB SITE AT www.col.org/knowledge. YOU ARE ALSO WELCOME TO CONTACT GRACE CHIN, KNOWLEDGE SERIES EDITOR, AT gcbc@axion.net. FOR PRINT COPIES, PLEASE CONTACT COL AT info@col.org.



COL's new web site

If you have visited COL's web site lately you would have noticed that it has been revamped with a new look and enhanced navigation and functionality.

This is the most substantial change since early 1993 when COL was one of the first organisations to launch a World Wide Web site on the Internet. The site contains new technological features that require some additional download time compared to the old site, but it still has relatively small file sizes to accommodate users throughout the world, recognising that the availability, reliability and size of bandwidth varies considerably across the globe.

Over the last few years, COL has significantly expanded its electronic publishing programme and has become recognised as one of the world's foremost sources of knowledge on open, distance and technology-mediated learning and its application in developing countries.

Accessed by experienced practitioners and novices alike, the site records thousands of visits per week and contains over 2000 pages of information and documents, along with hundreds of external links and online access to COL's Information Resource Centre collection catalogue.

The address is still www.col.org or you can go directly to one of the main areas on the site:

- News and features: www.col.org/news
- Programmes and services: www.col.org/programmes
- Knowledge resources: www.col.org/resources
- About COL and the Commonwealth: www.col.org/about

In addition, COL has produced a CD-ROM, *Expanding Learning Horizons*, that contains COL's most popular knowledge resources and recent publications and reports, along with a video on COL and its work. COL also issues regular electronic (e-mail) bulletins.

To receive a copy of the CD-ROM, or to be added to our electronic distribution list, please send your request to info@col.org. Comments and questions are always welcome.

COL in Action

A virtual university for small states?

The *Halifax Statement on Education in the Commonwealth*, issued in November 2000 by Commonwealth Ministers of Education, requests COL to pursue the establishment of a virtual university to serve small states. In response, COL has commissioned a study on the purpose, design and economics of establishing a Commonwealth Virtual University. Its findings will be presented to Ministers of Education at their next meeting, scheduled for September 2003. Dr. Glen Farrell, former President of the Open Learning Agency in British Columbia, Canada, is the senior consultant for the study.

Distance education consortium formed for A.P. State, India

COL played a catalytic role in forming a consortium on distance education in the Indian State of Andhra Pradesh during a workshop organised jointly by COL and the A.P. State Council for Higher Education (APSCHE) held in Hyderabad in May 2001. Participants at this COL-sponsored and first ever meeting of State distance educators and Vice Chancellors agreed to form the Andhra Pradesh Consortium of Open and Distance Education (APCODE) to comprise all the State Directorates of Distance Education (DDEs) as well as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University. APSCHE will provide the platform and co-ordinate the consortium's activities. APCODE will meet regularly and convene an annual meeting of Vice Chancellors and Directors to review good practice in distance education and collaborative activities that members will be engaged in, such as:

- collaborating to improve communications and sharing of problems, experiences, solutions, ideas and opportunities – taking advantage of the new information technology infrastructure available in the State;
- sharing resources and technologies (study centres, expertise, materials production, etc.);
- training staff and teachers in the development, design and delivery of distance education;
- developing innovative courses and delivery strategies.

Other results of the workshop included an assessment and identification of problem areas in policy and operation, training needs for distance education and delivery

mechanisms especially with reference to dual-mode institutions.

Workshop facilitators were Dr. Louise Moran, Director, Lifelong Learning Associates, Australia; Dr. V.S. Prasad, then Acting Vice Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University and now Vice Chancellor of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University; Dr. Usha Reddi, Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia; and Ms. Andrea Hope, COL's Specialist in Higher Education.

Increasing post-secondary access in the Caribbean

COL and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) are paving the way to enable more Caribbean students to qualify for entry into post-secondary educational and training institutions. CXC staff members were at COL's Vancouver headquarters in November for training in the development of self-study resource materials. It was the first stage of a training programme to fashion a Caribbean-wide secondary-level course delivery system to increase enrolments at the post-secondary level by 15% by 2005 through flexible and self-study options geared towards existing standard exams. This target was set by Caribbean Heads of Government, who wish to prepare more Caribbean students for university entrance and to encourage lifelong learning.

Currently, many students are unable to study beyond the basic level because secondary schools do not have the capacity to enrol all qualified students. "This represents a great loss of potential to the Caribbean," says Helen Lentell, COL's Education Specialist, Training and Materials Development. "Distance education can help to overcome these obstacles, which also exist throughout the rest of the developing world."

The Council was established in 1972 by 16 Caribbean countries and territories. It provides services to educational institutions throughout the region in the development of syllabuses, examinations and related administration.

Training orphanage workers: CIDA supports COL initiative

The number of orphans and children at risk in Africa is increasing dramatically. Although not always the best environment, many children end up in group homes or orphanages with caregivers who have little or no training in childcare and related areas. In responding to this situation, COL has initiated a project to identify and adapt, or develop, training materials to assist workers and volunteers who are responsible for the well-being of disadvantaged and orphaned children.

With funding support provided by the Canadian International Development Agency, COL's first step was to organise a meeting in Kampala, Uganda, of representatives from

16 African Commonwealth countries who manage or work in group homes, orphanages or similar institutions working with children at risk. Training needs were identified, a curriculum outline was drafted, learning objectives were defined and an overall implementation plan was developed.

COL assists in introducing DE for African nurses

In July 2001, COL supported a two-week training workshop on the development of open/distance learning programmes for nurses in Africa. The Nursing Council of Kenya asked the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) for help in use of distance education to upgrade its nurses from a certificate to a diploma level. With COL's assistance, AMREF conducted a workshop for nurse-trainers who will develop the programme, but who have little knowledge of open and distance learning. The workshop introduced instructional design techniques in the development of print-based course materials. After participants draft materials for the new programme, a second workshop will be held to review them and set a plan for testing.

Management institutes

COL and its partners organised and delivered three management institutes in 2001:



MANAGING CHANGE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE, AUGUST 2001

THE SECOND annual strategic development conference, *Managing Change – Leadership and Strategic Change in Higher Education*, for vice chancellors and other senior administrators from Sub-Saharan Africa was held in August 2001 at the University of Abertay Dundee's Dudhope Castle in Scotland. The University of Abertay Dundee, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Association of African Universities and COL are collaborating in hosting the programme series. Participation is restricted to 20 at each annual session for the five-year programme.

OUTSIDE DUNHOPE CASTLE, AT THE MANAGING CHANGE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE FOR AFRICAN VICE-CHANCELLORS.

LEFT TO RIGHT: COUNCILLOR MERVYN ROLFE, DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL; PROFESSOR JEAN ONGLA, SECRETARY GENERAL, UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE II, CAMEROON; MR. ALASDAIR MORRISON, MSP, THE THEN DEPUTY MINISTER FOR ENTERPRISE, LIFELONG LEARNING AND GAELIC, SCOTLAND; PROFESSOR BERNARD KING, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF ABERTAY DUNDEE AND DR. H. IAN MACDONALD, CHAIRMAN OF COL



SUB-SAHARAN TEACHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP, SINGAPORE

THE FIRST of a series of annual Management Development Workshops for Teacher Education Administrators from Sub-Saharan Africa, co-sponsored by COL and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, was held in Singapore in November 2001. The 16 participants represented 10 countries — Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Workshops covered four themes — distance education and teacher education, leadership and management, case studies on the operations of Nigeria's National Teachers' Institute and an orientation on Singapore's education system. The workshop series seeks to strengthen the capacities of Africa's teacher education systems, especially in the use of distance education. Local facilities are provided by the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University,



PARTICIPANTS AT THE SOUTH PACIFIC TVET MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE IN WELLINGTON

AS PART of its programme to assist Pacific island nations to increase access to skills development training, and with funding support from New Zealand's Official Development Assistance Programme, the first of three management institutes for senior managers and executive officers from the technical/vocational education and training (TVET) sector was held in Wellington in October 2001. Participants included 22 managers from 12 island states. The sessions highlighted policy issues encountered in moving toward open and distance learning. The meeting was organised



and hosted by The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand and the Whireia Community Polytechnic. The next two Institutes will deal with implementing and evaluating TVET open and distance learning. The occasion also provided an opportunity for the Pacific Islands Regional TVET Association to meet and to strengthen regional networks.

Reports are available from COL.

Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme

COL's Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme, offered in collaboration with India's Indira Gandhi National Open University, continues to enable students from developing Commonwealth countries to obtain a Master of Arts in Distance Education degree without leaving their countries. Some 60 students from 15 countries earned the degree through the first presentation.

The second presentation of the Scheme is now underway. Invitations to participate have been extended to Ministries of Education in 19 Commonwealth countries that were not included in the first round. Students are usually employed in a publicly funded institution offering distance-learning options or in a governmental policy function, and local tutors are contracted to provide learner support. A level of sponsorship from the nominating Government is required.

Excellence in Distance Education Awards

The deadline for nominations for COL's Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEA) is **31 January 2002**. This second EDEA presentation will take place in August 2002, in Durban, South Africa, at the second Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning. The theme for both the Awards and the Forum for 2002 is "Open Learning: Transforming Education for Development".

Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, President and CEO of COL, notes that "in honouring excellence in distance education, COL gives due recognition to remarkable achievements and endeavours to benefit those who seek to emulate examples of good practice in the field. COL's EDEA programme includes awards in four categories, acknowledging that excellence is being achieved at many points in the learning process: at the institutional level, in the development of learning materials and in terms of individual educator and student attainment."

Recipients of *Connections* will have received information on the awards and nomination procedures by mail. Details are also available on COL's web site.

www.col.org/edea



AT THE LAUNCH OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION VERSION OF INTRODUCTION TO SURGICAL SKILLS, LONDON, 13 SEPTEMBER 2001. LEFT TO RIGHT: PROFESSOR ARJUNA ALUWIHARE, DEVELOPER OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION MATERIALS; MR. BILL THOMAS, ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND SURGICAL SKILLS TUTOR AND AUTHOR/PRESENTER OF THE ORIGINAL FACE-TO-FACE MATERIAL; AND MR. CHRIS RUSSELL, INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE RCSE WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR FACILITATING THE DISSEMINATION OF BEST PRACTICE IN SURGERY AND SURGICAL SKILLS TRAINING TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

From COL's partners

Training surgeons: the next STEP

A COL-brokered distance learning project to enhance the training of junior surgeons is entering its second phase (2001/2002) with the release of a surgical skills training resource package that includes the principles of the safe handling of instruments and an introduction to resection and suturing techniques. The first phase of the project, initiated in early 2000, covers the basics of clinical surgery, and includes a supplementary module on undertaking surgery in tropical conditions (as profiled in COL's February 2000 issue of *Connections*).

The second phase, based on the *Basic Surgical Skills* three-day workshop offered by The Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCSE), was launched at the RCSE's Board of Governor's meeting at Lincoln's Inn Fields in London on 13 September 2001. The workshop's handbook and video format was modified for flexible distance delivery by Professor Arjuna Aluwihare of the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; the adapted "hands-on" training package, *Introduction to Surgical Skills*, is designed to complement existing programmes but can also be used as a standalone course. In addition to trainee surgeons, the course may also be of interest to a broader spectrum of health workers including nurses and rural practitioners. The project's initial phase was based on the Surgeons in Training Education Programme (STEP), a nine-month distance-training course also provided by The Royal College of Surgeons. The positive results of this first phase encouraged the current initiative, and an initial eight participating medical schools have since increased to ten for the second phase.

Other partners in this initiative are the Hamilton Bailey Memorial Trust and the British Council. Participating Commonwealth medical training institutions include The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Bangladesh, the University of Ghana Medical School, Mozambique's Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, the Vellore Christian Medical College in India, UCH Ibadan in Nigeria, the medical schools of MEDUNSA & the University of Transkei in South Africa, the Postgraduate Medical Institute in Sri Lanka,

Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Zimbabwe.

Institutions enquiring about the *Introduction to Surgical Skills* training package are welcome to contact COL. Applications for use will be considered individually. The materials are not available for sale to individuals.

"Information villages" win world technology award

One of COL's collaborators in India, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, and its former Head of Informatics, Dr. Venkataraman Balaji, were presented with the World Technology Award in Education for 2001, for their work with "information villages" in India, at the World Technology Summit, held in London in July. Dr. Balaji provided the following for Connections:

In many countries in Asia today, information and communications technologies (ICT) are seen as tools to generate national prosperity. Considerable investments are being made to effect a transition in these societies from an industrial or part-industrial economy to an ICT-based "new" economy.

From decades of experience in working with the very poor, Professor M.S. Swaminathan, "leader of the Green revolution" in India in the early 1990s, concluded that in order to generate truly wide benefits any new technology must bring benefits to the poor in the rural areas. But in order for these populations, handicapped by lack of literacy, to derive advantages from the new information found in the networks, the information must be transformed into locally specific knowledge that can be acted upon. Based on this insight, he conceived of the notion of "information villages" where the local families, especially the poor among them, are able to take advantage of emerging ICTs.

During 1998 – 2000, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation implemented a research project in Pondicherry in south India to give concrete shape to the concept of "information villages". This area has a sizeable population living at an income level of less than one dollar a day. The project started with a detailed survey of ordinary men and women's perception of where and how they got the most needed information and how they rated the reliability of various sources of

information in the immediate locality. It turned out that rural families generally depend on other rural families for most of the information they need. Linkages to the educational institutions were weak. The strongest information linkages were provided by money-lenders and middle-men.

In this context, the project introduced a hybrid of wired and wireless systems to access the Internet and helped in the development of a wireless local area network covering many villages. In each village the access centre, called "village information shop" or "village knowledge centre", was a community-sponsored one, in which local youth helped the rural men and women to obtain the information they were seeking most. Half the local centre managers were women. The youth who volunteered to run the daily operations were school-educated and they were given training by the project staff. The village centre operators, in turn, either trained or helped users to obtain what information they needed.

Over the years, the experiment has been extended to cover 15 villages with a total population of about 33,000 served. Evaluation data shows information on government welfare schemes for the rural areas and opportunities for higher education are sought the most (75%). Also, participation by women is significantly higher in these centres, compared to rural reading rooms or libraries, and children are most interested in browsing the available educational CDs.

The project did not wait for major technological breakthroughs or policy changes to occur and moved on with what was available, blending a number of technologies. The wired-wireless hybrid is one example. The other is solar power and battery back-up to avoid down-time that would otherwise result from the frequent power outages. A blend of satellite-based data broadcasting technology and hard-wired file transfer on the Internet has also been used to enable the rural families to access graphics-rich web sites. www.msrf.org

Dr. Balaji, who was the director of this project, is now with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), headquartered in India.

Open University of Malaysia opens

The Open University of Malaysia – Universiti Terbuka Malaysia, or UNITEM – accepted its first batch of 1,200 students in July 2001. UNITEM, a private institution owned by 11 public universities and endorsed by the Ministry of Education, will deliver all its programmes through distance learning methods using a combination of traditional and electronic/multimedia technology. It plans on a student intake of 22,000 within five years, especially targeting adults who are school leavers or who were unable to obtain places at other universities. Tuition fees will be competitively priced. www.unitem.edu.my



PNG ASSOCIATION FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION SEMINAR ORGANISERS, DURING PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S NATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK. LEFT TO RIGHT: MR. MAC ARREOLA, MR. PARAKA PENA (CHAIR OF PNGADE AND ACTING DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA), MR. JOHN BARTRAM (COL'S EDUCATION SPECIALIST, TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, WHO WAS A PRESENTER AT THE SEMINAR) AND MRS. AGNES HOTA

PNG national education week

"Continuing Education through Distance and Open Learning" was the theme of this year's National Education Week in Papua New Guinea. It was opened on 1 October 2001 by the then Minister for Education, Research, Science and Technology, the Honourable Professor John Waiko (now Minister of Foreign Affairs), in Port Moresby and concluded on 5 October with another ceremony in Bougainville.

Activities held during the week included a talk-back radio programme, an exhibit at the College of Distance Education (CODE) and a one-day seminar focussing on the theme that was organised and hosted by the PNG Association for Distance Education (PNGADE). The seminar was attended by practitioners from schools, colleges and universities, together with Ministry of Education staff, who heard speakers and engaged in discussions about the ways in which open and distance learning could increase participation in education in PNG.



Commonwealth consortium for education

A number of Commonwealth education bodies have formed the Commonwealth Consortium for Education. It aims to promote education about the Commonwealth and its fundamental values of democracy, tolerance and respect for diversity.

At its inaugural meeting in London, the consortium's founding members agreed to press for education as a priority concern for Commonwealth collaboration, a position they intend to pursue at the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

The Consortium comprises 13 non-governmental bodies that aim to mobilise

support for education co-operation programmes, working closely with official Commonwealth agencies, national governments and agencies and other non-governmental organisations. Professor Colin Power, Vice-President of the Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators, chairs the steering group.

The Consortium includes the Association of Commonwealth Examinations and Accreditation Bodies; the Association of Commonwealth Studies; the Commonwealth Association for Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators; the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management; the Commonwealth Countries' League; the Commonwealth Institute; the Commonwealth Linking Trust; the Council for Education in the Commonwealth; the English-Speaking Union of the Commonwealth; the Federation of Commonwealth Open and Distance Learning Associations (FOCODLA); the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and its Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit; and the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT). Further information is available from: Anna Tomlinson, Director, LECT, 7 Lion Yard, London SW4 7NQ, UK; tel: +44 207 819 3932; fax: +44 207 720 5403; e-mail: anna.tomlinson@lect.org.uk

Official Commonwealth bodies such as the Commonwealth Secretariat and COL are not members of the consortium but will work with and support the members in achieving their goals. COL also supports FOCODLA.

SchoolNetAfrica launched

"Bridging the digital divide" has become the vogue particularly since the G8 proclaimed the Okinawa Charter in July 2000. Since then, several organisations have produced action plans and frameworks to fulfil this important objective. Meanwhile, a grassroots action movement on bridging the digital divide has been developing in Africa over the past three years. Organisations promoting education in African schools through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs),

otherwise known as "schoolnets", have mushroomed in over 20 African countries to date. This evolution has led to the establishment of SchoolNetAfrica to facilitate the growth and development of national schoolnets across the continent.

Headquartered in South Africa and governed by a 12-member steering committee representing 10 countries from five sub-regions and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, SchoolNetAfrica is the first African-based, African-led, pan-African school networking institution in place on the continent. In partnership with national schoolnets, SchoolNetAfrica is launching a number of flagship projects.

Already, national schoolnets have established partnerships with government ministries of education and telecommunications, the private sector and non-governmental organisations within their countries. Now, SchoolNetAfrica's "A-team Steering Committee" has forged partnerships with major donor and development agencies such as COL, the Open Society Institute for Southern Africa, the International Development Research Centre (Canada), the UN Economic Commission for Africa and UNESCO.

COL, through its Commonwealth Electronic Network for Schools and Education (www.col.org/cense), and SchoolNetAfrica have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that provides a framework for collaborating in a Schoolnet Champions Capacity Building Project as well as three other areas: research, the development of SchoolNetAfrica's knowledge warehouse and a pilot programme on curriculum integration.

SchoolNetAfrica focuses on developing African learners as critical thinkers by accessing world-class resources through information and communications technologies (ICTs). Its underlying philosophy is that ICTs have significant potential to enhance education in Africa and hold the key to pole-vault Africa into the 21st century. SchoolNetAfrica asserts that every African child has the right to have access to information and knowledge and to be a global citizen and contends that the private sector and donor community have a vested interest in these methods of improving the lives of African children and youth. www.schoolnetafrika.org.eg

FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM: MS. SHAFIKA ISAACS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SCHOOLNET AFRICA, PO BOX 31866, BRAAMFONTEIN 2017, SOUTH AFRICA; TEL: +27 11 339 2300; FAX: +27 11 339 5912; E-MAIL: shafika@schoolnetafrika.org.za



People

Queen's representatives

Former COL Board member, **Her Honour, The Honourable Iona Campagnolo, P.C., C.M., O.B.C.**, was installed on 25 September 2001 as the 27th Lieutenant-Governor of the Canadian Province of British Columbia.



IONA CAMPAGNOLO

Public service, advocacy, broadcast media and politics have shaped the career path of this third generation British Columbian. Her distinguished public service record includes being a federal cabinet minister appointed by former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. She succeeds **The Honourable Garde B. Gardom, Q.C.** Both current and past Lieutenant-Governors have been strong supporters of COL.

Sir John Vereker, Permanent Secretary of the British Department for International Development (and of its predecessor the Overseas Development Administration) since 1994, has been appointed Governor of Bermuda in succession to **His Excellency Thorold Masefield**. Sir John will take up his new appointment in February 2002.

COL Board

Internationally distinguished author, **Ms. Denise Chong**, has been appointed Canada's representative to COL's Board of Governors. She was named by Canada's Minister of International Cooperation,



DENISE CHONG

The Honourable Maria Minna, who is responsible for the Canadian International Development Agency. As one of six major financial contributors, Canada has a seat on the Board.

The Chairman of the Board, also a Canadian and former York University president, **Dr. H. Ian Macdonald**, welcomed the appointment. "We are fortunate that Ms. Chong has agreed to the Government's request that she join COL's Board. Her experience and insights will ably represent Canada and assist COL in its efforts to help shape improvements in access to quality education and a better future for Commonwealth citizens.

Ms. Chong, a former senior economic adviser to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, has served in several advisory capacities to the federal Government. She is on an advisory committee to the Clerk of the Privy Council of Canada on modernising human resource management in the federal public service. She was also a member of the Perinbam Task Force on Participation of Visible Minorities in the Canadian public service and was an

adviser on the federal Information Highway Advisory Council. Also an internationally published author, she is best known for her family memoir, *The Concubine's Children*. Her most recent book is *The Girl in the Picture*, about the napalm victim photographed during the Vietnam War. www.col.org/chong

Ms. Chong succeeds **Ms. Tina Sartoretto**, Registrar and Director of Student Affairs of Cambrian College in Ontario.

COL's host province, British Columbia, is also a major financial contributor and governmental supporter of COL. **The Honourable Shirley Bond**, Minister of Advanced Education has appointed **Mr. Gerry Armstrong**, Deputy Minister of her Ministry, as the province's representative on COL's Board, following the promotion of former Board member and Assistant Deputy Minister, **Ms. Robin Ciceri**, to Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Human Resources.

Dr. Tara de Mel, former Secretary, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka will join COL's Board in January 2001 as the representative for the Asian Region. **Pehin Dato Abu Bakar Apang**, Permanent Secretary (Professional and Higher Education), Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam, concludes his term as Asian Region representative at the end of 2001.

COL is grateful for the valuable contribution that members of the Board make in shaping its endeavours and records its particular appreciation to the retiring Board members. Board members serve without remuneration.

Dr. H. Ian Macdonald, O.C., Chairman of COL's Board of Governors, was awarded an Honorary D.Litt by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University in Hyderabad, India, in November. In his convocation address, he stated: "Education must not be an end in itself. Rather, we, as educators and as university graduates, must be constantly aware of our mission to prove the questioner ... wrong. Education must become the source of a more peaceful, tolerant and humane world if the globe itself, let alone globalisation, is to survive." www.col.org/speeches

COL staff

Professor Mohan B. Menon joined COL at the beginning of August 2001 as Education Specialist, Teacher Training, responsible for facilitating Commonwealth Governments and institutions in focussing on the use of open and distance education for professional development of teachers and other education personnel. Professor Menon, who has over 25 years of research, teaching and administrative experience, was Director of the Indira Gandhi National Open University School of Education from 1992 - 1996 and Chairman of India's National Open School from 1996 - 1999,



MOHAN MENON

after which he returned to his previous position at IGNOU. He has consulted in the areas of primary education, open schooling and open/distance teacher education for international agencies including UNDP, UNICEF and COL. www.col.org/mmenon

Mr. Paul West joined COL at the beginning of August 2001 as Education Specialist, Knowledge Management. From South Africa, his previous post at Technikon SA saw him setting up the African Digital Library, which serves users throughout the African continent who have Internet access. In his work there he also developed and implemented models for Information Communication Technology Centres. Mr. West will work on knowledge management issues, including harnessing the wealth of knowledge across the Commonwealth and to make it accessible to those who need it. www.col.org/pwest



PAUL WEST

Dr. Sanjaya Mishra joined the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in New Delhi, India, in July 2001 as Programme Officer. He specialises in information and communication technology applications for teaching and learning both at a distance and face-to-face. He was with one of Indira Gandhi National Open University's Regional Centres for three years before joining IGNOU's Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) in 1996. At STRIDE he was responsible for the revision of the course on communication technology for distance education, which is part of the Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE). He has also completed a World Bank Institute programme to become a Master Trainer on Improving Training Quality through Peer Learning and Distance Mentoring.



SANJAYA MISHRA

Mr. Lewis Perinbam, O.C., COL's Senior Adviser (External Relations), received the prestigious Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation Humanitarian Award in November 2001. The Award recognises a Canadian who has, personally or administratively, contributed significant service in the fields of health, education and nature conservation in the Himalayan Region of Nepal. Mr. Perinbam's dedicated service on behalf of the world's developing countries has been highlighted in particular by leadership and sensitivity to the impoverished people of Nepal. His leadership, planning and continuity of purpose have enabled the people to become more self-reliant in the areas of health, education and conservation. An Officer of the Order of Canada, Mr. Perinbam has had a distinguished career in the Canadian public service, in international

LEWIS PERINBAM (RIGHT)
RECEIVING THE SIR EDMUND
HILLARY FOUNDATION
HUMANITARIAN AWARD
FROM FOUNDATION
FOUNDER/PRESIDENT,
W. ZEKE O'CONNOR



international development as a shield against the tyranny that terrorism manifests. It reminds us that terrorism is rooted in the abject poverty that engulfs vast masses of the human family. It is the fertile soil that breeds the followers and collaborators of terrorism. Unless we

mobilise all our resources and strength to fight the greatest war of all — the battle against global poverty — we shall be vulnerable to the destructive forces that poverty and injustice release.

“The challenge we face is to recognise that human security unites our world as no other event has done in human history. It is the new face of international development. Today the world’s peoples are linked by a common danger and a common fate. Conventional approaches and attitudes cannot meet this new danger. This is where the non-governmental organisations such as The Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation come in. They provide the human edge to international development and in our common struggle against terrorism and in our efforts to build human security. They can fashion a new kind of global society, based, not in terms of those who give and those who receive, but on how we

can share the bounty of this earth that Providence has entrusted to our care. We may not succeed in all that we set out to achieve but let not future generations say of us that our generation lacked the courage or the vision to have made the effort. Sir Edmund Hillary has demonstrated what one person can accomplish. His example is a continuing inspiration to us to play our part, individually and collectively, in meeting one of history’s most formidable challenges – building peace and security out of the ravages of terrorism and hatred.”

organisations and in the private sector. He was Vice-President of the Canadian International Development Agency for 18 years.

The Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation provides increased medical services for the Khunde hospital and regional clinics in Nepal, as well as broadening the educational facilities for Sherpa children. The Foundation also promotes conservation through its reforestation programme in the Solu-Khumbu area.

In Mr. Perinbam’s remarks on the presentation of the Award, he said:

“The Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation has become even more significant since September 11. The tragic events of that day have thrust our world into one of the most perilous periods in history. More importantly, they have made human security the central issue of our time. It has given new relevance and meaning to

Australian business women’s award

Ms. Madeleine Woolley, Director, Adelaide Institute of TAFE, Australia, former COL Regional Adviser to the President and whose institution was the winner of 1999 COL Excellence in Distance Education Award recognising excellent distance education materials, was named the South Australia Community and Government Category winner in the annual Telstra Business Women’s Awards programme. Adelaide Institute of TAFE is a vocational training centre with 21,000 students enrolled in part-time and full-time studies as well as flexible learning alternatives. The Institute has gained international recognition for excellence under her leadership and, earlier this year, became a UNESCO Centre for Excellence.

COL/UNHCR course wins award

The training module *Writing Effectively for UNHCR* has won an ODLAA Award for Excellence in the Development and Delivery of Distance Education and Open Learning Programs issued by the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (ODLAA). Canberra-based course writer, Ms. Maree Bentley received the award in the “Programs in response to an international or cross-cultural need” category. Other development team members also received mention in the certificate: Course designer Professor David Murphy (Monash University, Melbourne*); editor Mr. Bill Potter; graphics designer Ms. Karen Tan; and project leader Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan and project manager Ms. Angela Kwan, both of The Commonwealth of Learning.

The award citation from ODLAA reads in part: “*Writing Effectively for UNHCR* demonstrates a commitment to excellence that is amply reflected in the final product. The overall high quality represents the convergence of a range of attributes, the most notable of these being: an in-depth understanding of the target group and its needs; sound background research; and attention to the appropriateness of learning strategies and media.”

Like many organisations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) used traditional courses in effective writing. While effective, they were not accessible to all staff, particularly those in remote field offices. In late 1999 UNHCR’s Staff Development Section took the initiative to see whether it could run an effective writing course through distance learning. UNHCR sought COL’s experience and capabilities to develop the programme. “We could have bought an effective writing course off the shelf,” says Julianne DiNenna who coordinated course development in UNHCR “but we felt that it was important to produce a course relevant to UNHCR staff which would also reflect our own cultural diversity as well as writing style, standards and formatting.”

Since the course was launched in early 2001, 500 UNHCR staff in over 70 countries have enrolled. The course can accommodate 100 new students every three months. The UNHCR Staff Development Section now intends to develop other courses for its staff based on this successful model. “UNHCR, with its staff dispersed so widely in so many locations needs to develop more distance learning opportunities for its staff and this module establishes an excellent example of the democratisation of learning in our



COURSE WRITER AND DESIGNER, MS. MAREE BENTLEY
AND PROFESSOR DAVID MURPHY

organisation.” says Michael Alford, Chief of Staff Development in UNHCR.

“Well-designed distance learning programmes have the strength to address the training challenges of international humanitarian agencies by helping them to achieve more at less cost and widening training access for staff based in remote parts of the world,” says Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, President and CEO of The Commonwealth of Learning. “COL is delighted to partner with UNHCR to help showcase what can be done with imagination and commitment to achieving the learning objectives.”
www.col.org/newsrelease

* While Professor Murphy was at Monash University’s Centre for Higher Education Development at the time of course development, he is now Acting Director of the Centre for Research in Distance and Adult Learning (CRIDALA) at the Open University of Hong Kong.

Events

Delhi meetings

Several events took place in conjunction with the meeting of COL's Board of Governors in November 2001 in New Delhi, which involved COL staff and Board members who were present. These included a colloquium on emerging scenarios in distance education, a roundtable for international educational broadcasters active in educational television and a workshop on the dissemination of materials developed for the empowering of rural women, the latter in collaboration with IGNOU's School of Continuing Education. COL also supported and made presentations at an international conference on volunteerism, NGOs and open schooling organised by India's National Open School.



INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING IN THE COMMONWEALTH, NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 2001

Educational broadcasters made recommendations about creating a forum for professional and organisational networking, engaging in co-operative research initiatives and mounting an awards programme.

Pan-Commonwealth Forum/virtual conferences

The second **Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning** will be held at the International Convention Centre in Durban, South Africa, from Monday, 29 July to Friday, 2 August 2002. The Forum is being hosted by COL, the National Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa (NADEOSA) and the South African Department of Education, in collaboration with the Commonwealth's open and distance learning professional associations. The theme is "Open Learning: Transforming Education for Development".

An e-mail-based, **pre-Forum virtual conference** series will start up in early 2002. COL will host the conferences, but each will be moderated and co-ordinated by a different member organisation of the Federation of Commonwealth Open and Distance Learning Associations. There will be six monthly conferences, each lasting two to three weeks, and a plenary session will be held at the Forum where moderators' reports will be presented and discussed. Virtual conference topics will be:

- Bridging the digital divide (February)
- Technology and lifelong learning (March)
- The future of technology for developing countries (April)



SOUTH PACIFIC DISTANCE EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM: COL WAS REPRESENTED AT THIS MEETING BY ITS VICE PRESIDENT, BRIAN LONG

- Distance learning in the small and island states in the Commonwealth (May)
- Quality assurance in open and distance education (June)
- Open and distance learning for community and social development (July)

Watch COL's web site and the Forum web site for details on the virtual conferences and how to participate – or request information by contacting COL at info@col.org.

Programme committees are now reviewing 135 parallel session presentation abstracts that have been submitted. Conference brochures have been posted and details are also available on the web at <http://colforum.mweb.co.za>.

Please also see page 4 for information on making nominations for COL's Excellence in Distance Education Awards that will be presented at the Forum. www.col.org/edea

Caribbean CEOs

The annual COL-convened meeting of Chief Education Officers from the Commonwealth Caribbean region and the Association of Caribbean Chief Education Officers (ACCEO) was held in Barbados in October 2001. It provided an opportunity for the participants to discuss various open and distance learning initiatives that COL and others are working on with partners in the region. They include:

- the establishment of a regional distance education association;
- the Caribbean Regional Educational Management Information System project;
- the launch of the University of Technology, Jamaica special diploma in teaching programme for technical/vocational education and training, which is using the COL-co-ordinated, regionally developed curriculum; and
- the COL/Caribbean Examinations Council project on the development of open and flexible learning materials (see COL in Action, page 3).

Participants noted that, "Over the years, COL has provided significant and invaluable assistance to the region particularly in implementing programmes in open and distance learning. Further, the partnership that exists between the Association and The Commonwealth of Learning continues to be a catalyst in the region's determination

to improve standards. The ACCEO is grateful to COL for its continuing support." www.col.org/newsrelease/0110CaribCEOs.htm

Global Learn Day

The Benjamin Franklin Institute of Global Education presented its fifth annual Global Learn Day on 6/7 October 2001. COL's President and Chief Executive Officer, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan was a keynote speaker and COL's recently published book on telecentres was used as a backgrounder for discussions. Professor Dhanarajan discussed how telecentres are part of the response in overcoming the digital divide. Thousands of people from 24 time zones participated in the 24-hour web- and audio-cast. The event is free to anyone with an Internet connection and, in some locations, is available on community radio. This year's participants included people talking from solar-powered telecentres in Nigeria, scientists talking to the audience by ham radio from Antarctica, a young mother in New Zealand and an Aboriginal community in Australia. www.bfranklin.edu and www.col.org/telecentres

New Zealand DEANZ conference

"Evolving eLearning" is the theme of the biennial conference of the Distance Education Association of New Zealand to be held from 10 – 12 April 2002 at Te Papa, Wellington, New Zealand. www.deanz.org.nz

Rescheduled CHOGM and AAOU meetings

Due to concerns related to world events at the time, these two conferences have been postponed to early 2002:

- The biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), hosted this year by the Government of Australia and originally scheduled for Brisbane in October will now take place on Queensland's Sunshine Coast from 2 – 5 March 2002. www.chogm2001.net
- The XV Annual Conference of the Asian Association Open Universities (AAOU), to be hosted by the Indira Gandhi National Open University in New Delhi, has been rescheduled from November to 21 – 23 February 2002. www.ouhk.edu.hk/~AAOUNet

Now available

Publications and studies

The Changing Faces of Virtual Education, released in mid-2001, is the latest virtual learning study from COL. It reports on the latest macro developments in virtual education and follows up on the findings of COL's 1999 landmark publication, *The Development of Virtual Education: A global perspective*, which tracked trends in the virtual delivery of higher education. Both reports were funded by the British Department for International Development and were widely reported on and referenced in online as well as print-based distance learning publications.

The 1999 report found that the development of virtual education was "more rhetorical than real." This year's follow-up study concludes that "virtual education development is a lot more rhetorical, and a lot more real," says Dr. Glen Farrell, editor and study team leader of both reports.

Two years have witnessed a surge of interest in virtual education, which now forms part of the planning agenda of most organisations concerned with education and training. The

focus, however, remains on using technology to enhance the delivery of existing programmes and courses for flexibility, accessibility and cost-effectiveness. Virtual education is still regarded primarily as a way to generate revenue for the institution by adding

value to existing programmes and courses, rather than as an alternative to traditional educational delivery. The rapid pace of development in virtual activities has also resulted in a wide body of terminology that is imprecise and confusing. Growth in virtual education development is most marked in countries with mature economies and an established information and communications technologies (ICT) infrastructure; lack of ICT infrastructure and development capital hampers the efforts of developing countries to use virtual education models for mass education.

However, the study concludes that emerging broad trends are likely to bring about radical changes to the way we think about the concepts of campus, curriculum, courses, teaching/learning processes, credentials/awards and of how ICTs can enable and support learning. These macro developments include new venues for learning, the use of "learning objects" to define and store content, new organisational models, online learner support services, quality assurance models for virtual education and the continuing evolution of ICTs. Each of these is defined in individual chapters, with the final chapter focussing on their collective impact on future models for virtual education.

The report's findings emphasise the role that these macro developments are likely to have in the evolution of virtual education systems in developing countries. Both the follow-up report and its predecessor are available in PDF format on COL's web site. 152 pages. www.col.org/virtualed

Reflections on Ten Years of The Commonwealth of Learning. By Gajaraj Dhanarajan. The purpose of this document is to reflect on and encourage discussions about COL and its strategic objectives for the next ten years, beginning July 2000. It draws on COL's experiences since its inception in November 1988 and builds on COL's initiatives during its first decade and, at the same time, benefits from global knowledge and experience in the application of open and distance learning in the last five years. 80 pages. www.col.org/resources/publications/#reflections

Brave New Women of Asia: How distance education changed their lives. Asha S. Kanwar and Margaret Taplin, Editors. The aim of this book of case studies is to inspire and encourage women to participate in open and distance learning. From the case studies, potential women learners will see that most of their reservations and fears are unfounded. Other questions in their minds about how to cope with studies after a long gap, at a mature age or without regular tutorials are answered as they read about the experiences of other women. 82 pages. www.col.org/resources/publications/#brave

Knowledge Series. Six new titles (see article on page 2) www.col.org/knowledge:

- Designing online learning (Sanjaya Mishra)
- Using community radio for non-formal education (John Thomas)
- Analysing costs/benefits for distance education programmes (Greville Rumble)
- Audio/audioconferencing in support of distance education (Paul Macmullen)
- Video/video-conferencing in support of distance education (Linda Stilborne and Peter MacGibbon)
- Using telecentres in support of distance education (Colin Latchem)

All of the publications noted above are available for download from COL's web site free-of-charge. They are also available in print from COL at a nominal cost.

COL has supported the publication of *South and East Asian Adult Education: Chronologies in Commonwealth Countries*. Dr. James A. Draper, Editor and Project Director. It provides an historical perspective on the factors that influenced how, why and where men and women learn; the various ways in which learning was organised and delivered; and the organisations that were created to meet the needs of adult learners. It is available from Universiti Putra Malaysia Press, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia; tel: 60 3 8948 6101 (ext. 1326); fax: 60 8941 6172; e-mail: gala@admin.upm.edu.my. It follows on the 1998 publication of a similar

study on Africa, *Africa: Adult Education Chronologies in Commonwealth Countries*, available from Cape Publications, University of Western Cape, South Africa.

Web site – literacy project

COL's new web site includes a new **literacy project section**. For the past two years, COL has been implementing a pilot project in India and Zambia that focuses on exploring ways that information and communications technologies can be used to enhance non-formal adult literacy education programmes. The British Department for International Development is providing funding for this major initiative. The project will conclude in late 2002.

COL has established a web site for the project which provides a full description of the study and a background on literacy programmes in the respective countries, and is kept up to date with information on the development processes the project has gone through, reports and outcomes. While the site is designed primarily for those directly involved in the project and its evaluation, it will also be of interest others who are working in this or related areas. Comments and questions are welcome.

www.col.org/literacy



Connections

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EdTech News



SIMPUTER

AS THE GLOBAL ECONOMY becomes increasingly reliant on electronic communications, more than four billion people world-wide remain untouched by the information and communications technology revolution. But with ingenuity, talented individuals, not based in Seattle or the Silicon Valley, are helping to narrow the digital divide with their inventions. One such device is the Simputer.

A simpler computer

In an effort to bring the Internet to the masses in India and other developing countries, several academics and engineers have used their spare time to design and build a handheld "appliance" for accessing the Internet that costs less than US\$200. Called the Simputer, for SIMple comPUTER, the device has great potential for enabling India's poor and illiterate population to surf the Web and empower themselves with knowledge. The Simputer was created by professors and students at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) at Bangalore (www.csa.iisc.ernet.in) and engineers from the Bangalore-based design company, Encore Software Limited (www.ncoretch.com).

In order for the simple computer to be of use to those who it was designed to serve — India's and the world's substantial population that is unable to read or write — engineers developed a remarkable text-to-speech software called Information Markup Language (or Illiterate Markup Language). The software enables the Simputer to translate English text into a variety of Indian languages and then read the information aloud to the user.

The Simputer is built around Intel's StrongARM CPU and uses the open source (share-ware; free) Linux operating system. It has 32 MB of flash memory, a monochrome liquid-crystal display (LCD)

with a touch panel overlay for pen-based computing, a local-language interface and web and e-mail software. It also has Infrared Data Association (IDA) and Universal Serial Bus (USB) interfaces and is able to access the Internet via dialup modem or through other add-on means.

The designers expect the Simputer to be used not only as a personal Internet access device, but also by communities of users at kiosks and telecentres. Using a smart-card interface, it could also be used for specialty applications such as personal banking.

The intellectual property rights for the device has now been transferred without cost to the non-profit Simputer Trust and both the hardware and software have been offered as open source technology. In the open source model of development, users and developers work together without remuneration to improve and upgrade technology.

The Simputer is currently part of a wireless interactive data broadcasting trial in the Bastar district of central Chhattisgarh state in India. The initiative is sponsored by WorldSpace Foundation using WorldSpace's AsiaStar digital broadcasting satellite.

Credit-card-like smart-cards function as blackboards, notebooks and report cards in the Bastar education project. Each student's own smart-card enables him or her, as well as teachers and the course designer, to monitor the progress of lessons studied and facilitate students in non-formal education programmes to study at their own pace and according to their level of advancement.

Using the Simputer and wireless broadcasting, lessons and web pages can be delivered even to the most remote villages that have only the most basic services. If proven successful, WorldSpace Corporation plans to expand its reach to other regions of the developing world. WorldSpace satellites now cover all of Asia and Africa, and will include South/Central America and the Caribbean in the near future.

www.simputer.org
www.WorldSpace.org
www.WorldSpace.com



DVD – zoned out

Digital versatile disc, or DVD, is the next generation of optical disc storage technology. It's a bigger, faster CD-ROM that can hold cinema-like video and better-than-CD audio as well as computer data. DVD aims to replace audio CD, videotape, laserdisc, CD-ROM and video game cartridges for both distribution and user storage/recording. It has widespread support from all major electronics companies, all major computer hardware companies and all major movie and music studios. With this unprecedented support, DVD has become the most successful consumer electronics product of all time in less than three years of its introduction. Advantages of DVD include:

- over two hours of high-quality digital video (a double-sided, dual-layer disc can hold eight hours of high-quality video or 30 hours of VHS-quality video);
- multi-tracking to accommodate different audio or subtitle languages, camera angles, video storylines, karaoke options, etc;
- searchable credits and other related information;
- instant access to any recorded data (no more rewinding and fast-forwarding tape);
- interactive features; and
- compact and durable.

There are, however, issues that have emerged concerning regional restrictions on distribution by the movie industry and also with the recent introduction of DVD recording devices for consumers.

DVD burners will, like CD burners, allow many to produce or illegally copy (and even illegally distribute) their own DVDs, once the price lowers on both blank DVD discs (currently around US\$15) and hardware prices (currently around US\$1000).

Motion picture studios also want to control the home release of movies in different countries because theatre releases are not always simultaneous (a movie may come out on video in the U.S. when it is just hitting screens in Europe). Also, studios sell rights to different foreign

distributors and would like to guarantee an exclusive market. Therefore, they required that the DVD standard include codes that can be used to prevent playback of certain discs in certain geographical regions. Each player is given a code for the region or purpose in which it is sold. The player will refuse to play discs that are not coded for its region. This means that discs bought in one country may not play on players bought in another country. Some suggest that regional codes are an illegal restraint of trade, but this has not, as yet, been tested in courts.

Regional codes are, however, entirely optional for the maker of a disc and restrict access only to video recordings. Discs without such codes will play on any player in any country. But television formats still need to be considered. North American standard NTSC discs, with Dolby Digital audio, play on over 95% of DVD installations worldwide, but PAL system discs play on very few players outside of PAL countries.

USB 2.0

The first Universal Serial Bus (USB) 2.0 devices are starting to appear in stores, although the new USB ports will not be common on personal computers until next year. USB 2.0 makes everything from printers and keyboards to digital cameras and MP3 players easier to install and run. The USB Implementers Forum, which includes Microsoft and Intel, created USB 2.0, which is 40 times faster than USB 1.1 and can move data as fast as 480 Mbps; USB 1.1 operates at 12 Mbps. Apple Computer has developed the rival IEEE 1394, which has become the standard on

digital video camcorders. However, not many IEEE 1394 scanners, external hard drives and external CD drives attract large sales. USB 2.0 also has a marketing edge in that Intel makes the microprocessors for most Windows PCs and makes many of the subsidiary chips. The company is expected to build USB 2.0 into those subsidiary chips by next year.

The Baltimore Sun

Satellite telephones

This may be the time to begin considering the purchase of a satellite telephone more seriously. The US\$5 billion investment in the Iridium company has just been sold by the liquidators to an investor for US\$25 million or 0.5% of the asset value of the company (before its liquidation). The new owners, who don't have the very high overhead costs of the original owners are now looking to sell their telephone airtime at around US\$2.00 per minute, a major reduction in price from Iridium's original US\$12 per minute. Target customers are people and organisations in the marine, aviation, oil and mining industries. Areas of the world that are unlikely to receive any terrestrial telecommunications (e.g., by land lines and



cellular telephones) in the foreseeable future may now consider this an affordable, workable technology for essential communication.

www.iridium.com

The origin of the Internet

Did you know that the beginning of the Internet can be traced back to the year 1866?

The first transatlantic cable to transmit communications and information from one continent to the other was laid on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean in 1858 but unfortunately it didn't work. It was only in 1866 that the first fully operational cable was successfully laid on the bottom of the sea. Today, there is over 300,000 Km of underwater cable connecting countries from all over the world and despite the modern deployment of numerous satellite systems, much of it is still in use.

Almost 100 years later, in 1969, in a computer laboratory at UCLA, Professor Leonard Kleinrock — widely considered the founder of the Internet — and his small group of graduates hoped to log onto another computer at Stanford University and send it a message. They would start by typing "login" and see if the letters would appear on the other computer screen situated only 450 km away. As they started the experiment and typed the first letters on the keyboard, they communicated with each other by phone to verify the progress. Professor Kleinrock described how the progress of the first e-mail ever sent on the Internet went:

"Do you see the L?"

"Yes, we see the L," came the response.

We typed the O, and we asked, "Do you see the O?"

"Yes, we see the O."

Then we typed the G, and the system crashed!

A revolution had begun...

Source unknown

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Learning materials available from COL

COL negotiates Commonwealth-wide rights for use or adaptation of existing learning materials by publicly funded educational institutions in developing countries. Also, materials that it develops in collaboration with Commonwealth Governments are always available for use elsewhere, usually together with important testing and use "lessons learned."

Print masters and/or electronic copies of the following learning materials are currently available:

- **Learning About Small Business** — developed collaboratively by COL and UNESCO to encourage small business at a local level in island nations. This would help add commercial value to local cultural activities, increase the

ability of people to harness their skills in planning successful small commercial enterprises and help them to realise that they can play an important part in their nation's economy.

- **Educational Technology Professional Development Programme** — developed by Grant MacEwan College and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology to address faculty needs identified at various post-secondary institutions in the province of Alberta, Canada. Nine self-instructional modules are included: survey of educational technology, independent study and distance education, instructional design, design and layout of print-based learning materials, an introduction to the Internet,

survey of educational technology research, managing student data and historical records, adapting your course for distance education and writing a print-based module.

- **STAMP 2000+** — 45 modules developed collaboratively by administrations in eight Southern African Commonwealth countries, with assistance from COL, to train and upgrade upper primary and junior secondary teachers and administrators in science, technology and mathematics (STAMP) as well as general programmes. (See *Connections*, June 2001)

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