



THE COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

PERSPECTIVES ON
DISTANCE EDUCATION

Telecentres: Case studies and key issues

Management | Operations | Applications | Evaluation

*Colin Latchem and
David Walker, Editors*

Published by
The Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, 2001

THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

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PERSPECTIVES ON DISTANCE EDUCATION: Telecentres: Case studies and key issues
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National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Telecentres

(Perspectives on distance education)

Includes index.

ISBN 1-895369-88-6

1. Telecommuting Centers. 2. Distance education. 3. Telecommunication in education. I. Latchem, R. (Colin R.) II. Walker, David, 1953- III. Commonwealth of Learning (Canada) IV. Series.

LC5800.T453 2001

384

C2001-910401-4

Photo credits: p. 27 WA Telecentre Support Unit; pp. 34 and 38 Queensland Open Learning Network; p. 60 Bill Murray, Small World Connections; p. 65 David Evans, Financial Projections Ltd; pp. 76 and 81 Peter Benjamin, LINK Centre, The University of Witwatersrand; pp. 99, 103 and 105 Sergio Aranda, LearnLink, Paraguay; pp. 111, 113 and 116 Uganda National Commission for UNESCO; p. 128 Polly Gaster, Eduardo Mondlane University; pp. 131 and 137 Paul West, Technikon Southern Africa; pp. 141, 145 and 148 Jonnie Akakpo, LearnLink, Ghana.

Published by:

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PREFACE

Information communication technologies (ICTs) are fast becoming essential tools in the delivery of information, knowledge and education all over the world. Their application among developing Commonwealth countries is, although slow, expected to increase as the costs of appliances and telephony decrease. Anticipating this increase and mindful that some valuable lessons have been learnt about the role of ICT-based telecentres in supporting educational and community development in both rich and poor countries, The Commonwealth of Learning decided to assemble in a single volume 14 case studies, five chapters summarising the key issues and an appendix of valuable print and online resources on the subject within its *Perspectives in Distance Education* series.

This is the first book to thus examine developments in this field. The eclectic collection of case studies provided by practitioners and observers of telecentre development offers many useful insights into the ways in which these centres can be designed to serve the educational, socio-economic and communications needs of particular communities and how they can be accommodated, managed and used to good effect. The stories told by these contributors cover developed and developing countries, formal and informal education and training, teleworking, government and community information services, and private and public sector participation. They evidence the factors that determine the success or failure of such centres: the appropriateness of the facilities and learning materials; the sustainability of the funding system; participatory governance and management; the creation of an encouraging and welcoming learning environment; and respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures. It is our belief that this book will help anybody interested in the development, management and use of telecentres to make wise decisions on these matters.

The Commonwealth of Learning was very fortunate in attracting the 23 authors to make their valuable contributions to this monograph. We were also fortunate in the choice of our two editors who drew upon their experience and knowledge of educational and technology development to shape and enrich the information contained in this book. To all of these colleagues, I extend our warmest appreciation for work well done.

We hope you, the reader, will derive as much benefit from this book as we have in bringing it together.

Dato' Professor Gajjaraj Dhanarajan

*President and Chief Executive Officer
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INTRODUCTION

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The Commonwealth of Learning

Founded in 1987, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was inspired by the vision that the peoples of the Commonwealth must and can have access to knowledge, regardless of where they live and whether they are rich or poor. Member Governments have given COL a mandate to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education materials, expertise, technologies and other resources. Working with and providing services to hundreds of institutions throughout the Commonwealth, COL acts as a knowledge provider, catalyst for collaborative action, capacity-builder and trainer.

In the 1990s, COL introduced *Perspectives on Distance Education*, a series featuring case studies to assist policy-makers, managers and practitioners in matters of distance and open learning. The topic of telecentres is seen as a timely addition to this series.

Within many urban, peri-urban, rural and otherwise disadvantaged communities, access to education means access to a better future. In the quest for access, considerable emphasis is placed on the potential of information and communications technologies (ICTs). However, about 90% of the people in the developing world have never used a telephone and about 40% are still without electricity. Given the parlous state of these economies, it is unlikely that ICT-based services will roll out rapidly or reach beyond the main settlements and favoured regions. And even where universal service is achievable, it cannot be assumed that the users are motivated, aware of how to take advantage of the new services or able to afford them.

The July 2000 Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society declared that everyone everywhere should be enabled to participate in the benefits of the global information society, and it pledged to help poorer nations overcome the “digital divide,” and so bypass the barriers to basic education, better healthcare and socio-economic development. One way that such barriers can be overcome is through the creation of public-access centres, variously known as telecentres, telecottages, télécentres, infocentros, telecentros, espacios numérisés, telestugen, community technology centres, phone shops, open learning centres, digital clubhouses, cabinas públicas, people’s economic posts and wartels.

In their most basic form, such centres may be no more than public call offices or telekiosks run by local shopkeepers to provide telephone and fax services. In their more advanced form, they aim to be multipurpose development agencies, offering

info-exchange tailored to suit government and community requirements for tele-education, teletraining, telemedicine, teletrading and telecommerce.

The telecentre movement had its origins in the mid-1980s in Scandinavia. It then spread to Western Europe, Australia and North America, and is now taking root in the former Eastern Bloc countries as well as in Africa, Asia and Latin America. International and national development agencies have recognised the potential of telecentres and are supporting initiatives in various parts of the globe.

This book draws upon the experiences of some of the world's leading experts in telecentres and is designed to help international agencies, governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and educational, training and community organisations establish, extend or improve such networks and centres.

Chapter 1, by **Sonja Oestmann** and **Andrew Dymond**, provides a global overview of ICTs and telecentres, critically examining the experiences to date and pointing to new directions and possibilities for telecentre development.

Chapters 2 – 13 feature case studies of telecentres — their histories, affiliates, functions, costs and funding, accommodation, management and staffing, training provision, publicity, access, technologies, research and evaluation — and the lessons learned from these operations.

Chapter 2, by **Gail Short**, describes the 76-centre Western Australian Telecentre Network, which serves remote and rural communities in Australia's largest state and is now providing a model for similar networks in Tasmania and New South Wales.

Chapter 3, by **Anne Gooley**, details the Queensland Open Learning Network, which in 10 years has grown from a two-centre pilot project to a state government-funded network of 50 Open Learning Centres supporting lifelong learning in regional communities.

In Chapter 4, **Keith Sheppard** describes the Remote Community Service Telecentres of Newfoundland and Labrador, a network providing telemedicine, tele-education, government and business/community services.

In Chapter 5, **Bill Murray**, describes the Hungarian telecottage movement that has resulted in more than 150 telecottages and has plans for about 50 more, plus about 600 satellite offices in support of the government's plans for information access and local economic regeneration.

In Chapter 6, **David Evans** discusses the work of the Warwickshire Rural Enterprise Network (WREN), a telecentre linked to the National Rural Enterprise Centre (NREC) and involved in the establishment of RuralNet.

In Chapter 7, **Peter Benjamin** describes the Gaseleka telecentre, designed to bring the benefits of ICTs and training to a remote community in South Africa's poorest province, one of the few South African centres making a profit and paying a half-decent wage.

Chapter 8 by **Norbert Hartig** explains how the Kitimat Community Skills Centre, the first of such centres to be established in British Columbia, provides technology- and workplace-based training in a remote northwest community.

Chapter 9 by **Sergio Aranda** and **Mary Fontaine** describes the AMIC@s, 12 pilot telecentres designed to introduce ICTs, democratic processes and lifelong learning into some of the poorest communities in the Municipality of Asunción in Paraguay.

Chapter 10, by **Meddie Mayanja**, describes the Nakaseke Multipurpose Community Telecentre in Uganda, designed to assist the process of reconstruction in an area severely affected by the civil unrest of 1971 – 1986.

In Chapter 11, **Polly Gaster** describes two pilot telecentres in Mozambique that are designed to bring ICTs to the poor and unemployed and to help ensure that Mozambique is a producer of indigenous material, not simply a consumer of content from developed countries.

Chapter 12 by **Leslie Howard** tells the story of the DaimlerChrysler Distance Learning Support Centre in Maseru, Lesotho, started as part of TELISA (the Technology Enhanced Learning Initiative of South Africa), which operates under Technikon South Africa.

Chapter 13 by **Jonnie Akakpo** and **Mary Fontaine** describes three Ghanaian Community Learning Centres run by NGOs and conceived as “learning laboratories” for community development.

The multipurpose community telecentre is still at the concept stage in India, but in Chapter 14, **Santosh Panda** and **Sohanvir Chaudhary** review ICT-based telelearning and teletraining in the sub-continent and offer some insights into introducing such systems into rural communities.

In Chapter 15, **Heather E. Hudson**, drawing on her experience as Coordinator of Evaluation and Learning Systems for the Acacia Programme, discusses the results of using the participatory model of evaluation in telecentres in Mali and Uganda.

In Chapter 16, **Heather E. Hudson** explains the value of formative and summative evaluation and describes the framework and processes needed to inform the planning and operations of telecentres.

In Chapter 17, **Imogen Bertin** discusses the introduction of teleworking into telecottages or telecentres and, citing case studies from the UK and Ireland, the types of work that can be undertaken using information and communications technologies.

In Chapter 18, **Bill Murray**, **Cathy Murray** and **Simon Brooks** describe developments and issues related to providing training for policy-makers, planners, telecentre managers and staff, and telecentre users.

Chapter 19, by **Mike Jensen** and **David Walker**, provides a comprehensive overview of the technology options and issues that need to be considered in planning and developing telecentres.

The book concludes with an appendix listing Web sites and publications about telecentres and ICTs.

We hope that this book will provide a useful guide for policy-makers, planners and managers considering the potential and practicalities of telecentres. We are grateful to all the contributors who shared their experiences, concerns and ideas with such

generosity. Their contributions were invaluable and have helped to make this book a unique record of the achievements being realised through the telecentre movement worldwide — achievements that are enabling these centres to (as the WA Telecentre Network strategic plan says) develop:

| From: | To: |
|---|--|
| An unrecognised resource | The first point of call |
| Low usage | Significant usage |
| A narrow focus on technology | A very broad focus on service delivery |
| A few services | A wide range of services and partnerships |
| Individual sites | A network |
| A backroom or add-on service | A centre for collocation of services |
| A drop-in centre | A service and information centre |
| Government business done for and to the community | Government services provided in association with the community |
| Top-down management | Community team management |
| Followers | Leaders and role models |
| A community profile | A community, state, national and international profile |
| An optional service | An essential service |



THE CONTRIBUTORS

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