

UNESCO-COL Workshops on Open Education Resources

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Welcome and Introductory Remarks

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Welcome: Sir John Daniel

On behalf of the organizers of this workshop, UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning, it is a pleasure to welcome you and to thank you for adding a day to your schedule in Cape Town for the ACU Executive Heads conference to attend this event. We hope that by the end of the day you will be pleased with your decision to stay on.

This workshop is part of a joint project between UNESCO and COL whose aim is to spread awareness and understanding of Open Educational Resources, or OERs, beyond the community of practice that has already grown up around them. It is coordinated by our colleagues Zeynep Varoglu at UNESCO and Trudi van Wyk at COL.

We are doing this because UNESCO and COL believe that OERs have considerable potential to widen access to higher education – both numerically and geographically – and to improve the quality of curricula and teaching. Very importantly, in these austere times, OERS can help to achieve these goals at low cost.

For this reason we thought it important to start our project by bringing the concept of OERs to the executive heads of universities and getting your views on how they might impact teaching and learning in your institutions. Next week we shall conduct a similar exercise with senior people from national quality assurance agencies for higher education at the conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education that is being held in Windhoek in neighbouring Namibia. The feedback from both these workshops will give us invaluable guidance for taking the rest of the project forward.

I am delighted that Ms Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, Chief of the Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality in UNESCO's Division of Higher Education is here with us for the workshop. Stamenka was also the Executive Secretary for the World Conference on Higher Education that UNESCO convened in Paris last July.

Over several days the 1,500 participants in that World Conference identified the most salient trends in higher education and drew up an agenda of change for the decade.

Stamenka will begin our proceedings by recalling some of the conclusions of the World Conference and suggesting how OERS might help us take some of its recommendations forward. After she has spoken I will come back with some brief remarks, based on my 17 years of service as an executive head in two Commonwealth universities, about how OERs can help to advance the scholarship of teaching. We shall then move into our first plenary session.

Introductory Remarks: Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

UNESCO is delighted to collaborate with the Commonwealth of Learning in organizing this workshop which is the first one of three within our joint project on *Taking OERs beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity Building for Developing Countries*.

We thank the Association of Commonwealth Universities for giving us this opportunity to address the institutional leaders that you are. We hope that greater use of Open Educational Resources can advance your own policies to improve access to quality higher education and that you will come to see them as a legitimate and attractive alternative to costly books and a way to expand your distance education offerings.

Let me start by clarifying terms, which I shall do by quoting the helpful definitions of Open CourseWare (OCW) and Open Educational Resources (OER) given by my COL colleague Paul West:

“Open CourseWare refers to publicly available materials that are either a part of or a complete course, usually from a higher-education institution such as a university or college.”

and

“Open Educational Resources are publicly available resources that may be used for educational purposes. The range in types of material is much broader than that for Open CourseWare, from suitability for children to college students to

professionals. These materials are more often smaller modules rather than complete lesson plans or complete courses.”

In addressing you today my main point of reference is UNESCO’s 2009 World Conference on Higher Education.

To achieve global coverage this World Conference was preceded by six regional conferences and many publications were commissioned to set the stage.

We were indebted to COL for a paper on *ICTs in Higher Education*. The Conference was a major event that attracted over 1,500 participants from governments, institutions, student associations, civil society, and the private sector.

From the political sphere it brought together leaders from countries big and small.

It also attracted many university leaders, professors and scholars, no doubt including some of you.

The broad HE community was well represented by students, who were vocal in all the political and professional debates, both as individuals and through their associations.

The recommendations of the World Conference will determine UNESCO’s agenda in higher education for the next decade.

We shall carry out the work under the guidance of our new Director-General, Irina Bokova from Bulgaria; who is the first woman ever elected to head UNESCO.

The title of the World Conference was *The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development*.

Let me share the three most significant new dynamics in higher education that emerged from the Conference and which have particular relevance to today’s topic.

The first is *growing demand for access* to higher education. Higher education’s role as the foundation of the knowledge society is now acknowledged by all.

University degrees and diplomas are seen as passports to a good future.

This dominant trend is now called the ‘massification’ of higher education. Worldwide, age participation rates have grown from 19% in 2000 to 26% in 2007. There were 150.6 million students enrolled in tertiary education globally in 2007, which represents a 53% increase over 2000. However, in low income countries age participation rates are still small and rose from 5% in 2000 to a modest 7% in 2007. We can expect to see continuing rapid growth in access to higher education

in those countries. At the same time we are aware that traditional institutions are no longer sufficient to respond to this growing demand which gives rise to a diversification of new providers of higher education.

The second trend is the role of new technologies in providing opportunities to expand access to quality learning and to facilitate the tasks of teachers. In particular, the emergence of a growing corpus of Open Educational Resources means that academics and students will be able to draw on a worldwide pool of excellent teaching and learning material that can be fully adapted to local needs.

The third trend is the internationalisation of quality assurance. It is vital to maintain quality as higher education diversifies through greater use of ICTs, more private provision, cross-border delivery and other new approaches.

Allow me now to be more specific what the WCHE had to say about OERs

Drawing on a session on OERs and the outcomes of the conference debates, the 2009 WCHE Communiqué (article 13) states that:

ODL approaches and ICTs present opportunities to widen access to quality education, particularly when Open educational Resources are readily shared by many countries and higher education institutions.

The WCHE session demonstrated that OERs may be used by instructors and learners in formal classroom settings, as well as by independent learners in the context of lifelong learning. To ensure that the OER movement gives rise to a true ‘global knowledge commons’ and to mitigate the risk that OERs be perceived as a ‘neo-colonial’ threat, it is imperative that all academics and their institutions, whether in developed or developing countries, be enabled to contribute resources.

This will require continuing improvement of infrastructure and bandwidth in developing countries, as well as on broadening modes of delivery, particularly through the use of handheld devices and other appropriate – often low-tech – technologies.

However, if OERs are to promote access to quality higher education, including them in quality assurance processes is vital. It is also necessary to include the full range of diverse emerging providers within quality assurance frameworks.

Another new dynamic identified by WCHE is the internationalization of quality assurance.

The Indian Minister of Human Resource Development, to quote his speech at the WCHE, expressed his approach to internationalising quality assurance rather well:

“The globalisation of higher education has added newer challenges in terms of quality assurance system, issues of mutual recognition and

equivalence of degrees and transparency in the regulatory structures of national systems of higher education. (...) Quality Assurance Systems should encourage effective learning processes which are adapted to the needs of various categories of learners. The systems should encompass not merely conventional programmes in higher education but also the borderless, private and continuing education.”

To explore how quality assurance should address OERs, another workshop in Namibia next week will be held with the higher education quality assurance community, taking advantage of the Forum of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). We hope to convince them to see the use of OERs as an important element of quality in developing learning and teaching materials in higher education.

We therefore look forward to the presentations of Dr Antony Stella and Neil Butcher on these particular issues.

Introductory Remarks: Sir John Daniel

Stamenka has recalled the themes and conclusions of last year’s World Conference on Higher Education and suggested how Open Educational Resources can help us implement some of its recommendations.

As she mentioned, the Conference Communiqué talked explicitly about the importance of OERs for the future of higher education. Later speakers will elaborate on the simple description of OERs that she quoted.

Before introducing the keynote address I conclude these welcoming remarks by suggesting that OERs are entirely consistent with the best of our academic traditions. I start by shooting down the idea that using OERs is just a fancy form of plagiarism – an opportunity for academics to use others’ teaching materials because they cannot be bothered to prepare their own.

I ask you to reflect on the contrast between the way that academics conduct research and how they prepare for teaching. When we engage in research we assume that we will build on the research of others. We cite previous work as background to our own, or to apply it to a new situation, or sometimes to challenge it. We publish our research results so that others can scrutinise our work and build on it in their turn.

Contrast this to the way we prepare for teaching. We usually scan current scholarship to ensure that our teaching is up to date. However, apart from recommending textbooks, we rarely make much use of others’ teaching materials, even if we could access them.

Furthermore, whereas we treat research as a public activity, until quite recently most academics considered teaching to be a private activity – except, of course, for the students present. Department heads were shy of attending their colleagues' lectures and academics took time to accept student evaluations of their teaching.

These attitudes began to change 20 years ago, thanks in part to the great American educationist, Ernie Boyer, and his book *Scholarship Reconsidered*. Starting from Aristotle's dictum that teaching is the highest form of understanding, Boyer insisted that knowing and learning are communal acts.

He distinguished four types of scholarship: the scholarship of discovery, which we usually call research; the scholarship of integration, that throws bridges between disciplines; the scholarship of application, that uses knowledge to solve real problems; and the scholarship of teaching – whose role, like research, is to transform and extend knowledge.

As a result of Boyer's work, the way that academics are evaluated for promotion and tenure has evolved from an almost exclusive focus on published research towards a more holistic conception of their work.

I took part in this transition when I was vice-chancellor of the UK Open University in the 1990s. We developed a system whereby colleagues aspiring to be promoted to a Chair – i.e. to Full Professor – had to show excellence in two of the three functions of research, teaching and service to the academic community.

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

Open Educational Resources place teaching in the public domain. OERs can be developed by individuals – what my Vancouver colleague Professor Tony Bates calls the 'Lone Ranger' approach – but more often they are developed by teachers working as a community.

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

OERs offer special advantages for distance learning – and I suspect that there are few Commonwealth universities represented here that are not now engaged in distance learning in some way.

The possibility of sharing teaching and learning materials has long been hailed as an advantage of distance education. Until recently, however, such sharing has encountered three obstacles which OERs now surmount.

First, institutions and their academic staff are prone to the ‘not invented here’ and the ‘not invented by me’ syndromes. The rich resources of the Internet, Google and social software are steadily curing that syndrome.

Second, until academic world went digital sharing materials was tiresome. They always needed adaptation, and this meant re-keying large amounts of text and changing illustrations.

Third, intellectual property rights were a nightmare. Copyrighted material was often buried in learning materials that claimed to be free of restrictions, and a conscientious institution had to proceed very circumspectly.

OERs are now removing the last two of these obstacles. First, they are almost invariably developed in digital format even if, here in Africa for instance, they often reach students in the form of print. That makes them easy to change and adapt.

Second, the various licences under which OERs are shared, with which you will become familiar at this workshop, mean that you can proceed with confidence both to develop and use OERs.

My final comment is that OERs can facilitate intellectual exchanges that are genuinely multi-directional and multi-national. I am delighted that we are holding this workshop in Africa and you will hear about the impressive work of OER Africa.

There are concerns for us to discuss. At the session on OERs at last years World Conference that Stamenka mentioned, the distinguished Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa, Professor Barney Pityana, said he feared that OERs would promote a form of intellectual neo-colonialism whereby the rich north rams its OERs down the throats of the poorer south.

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

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