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A Quarterly of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia

From the Director's Desk...

Struggling to cope with the pace of change in information and communication technologies is an experience we are all familiar with. Each time I go to a conference or meeting, I am flooded with new ideas, new media, new technologies. As an academic with old-fashioned skills, I feel out of place in a room full of new age educationists.

That new technologies are promoted as the latest "mantra" is something that we hear all the time. But what we sometimes forget is that technologies are not neutral - they carry with them values, ideologies, assumptions and preconditions; use and management practices; benefits and disadvantages (knowingly or unwittingly) of their source of origin.

But how technologies can be exploited in a society begins to include society's ideologies, assumptions, and preconditions. In other words, if in a given society, communities are denied education--they will also most likely be denied access to technology. Thus, one has to go beyond mere technology to determine what causes gender and digital divides.

But should we choose to deploy the technologies, it is essential that people like you or I need to understand the conditions of their optimum use and application. That these technologies be demystified, stripped of jargon and placed within social contexts is to me, a *sine qua non* of enlightened decision making.

It is for this reason, that we invited Dr. Badrul H Khan, an educational technologist of Bangladeshi origin, to reflect on what is needed to develop virtual education plans to enhance education through e learning in developing countries.

We then turned our attention to an innovative use of Internet technology in Malaysia, by showcasing the Mobile Internet Unit experiment. But we chose to profile an older and established media research organization, currently grappling with the social, environmental, and developmental issues in a fast changing country.

All these efforts are futile without a proper and quick sense of the field. For this reason, by exploring participatory rapid appraisal techniques, we show how it is possible to get the benchmark information we need to make project decisions.

In our book reviews, we focus on quality assurance on the one hand and on line learning in Asia on the other. And in the regular section on software review, we highlight authoring tools, their strengths and weaknesses.

Our usual new columns are also there with regional news, web reviews, and BiblioFile.

We appreciate hearing from you as it helps us to refocus our activities. At this stage we are interested in reader's views on the direction that this organization should move in as it prepares a perspective plan for the next ten years. I would welcome any views and comments that will help us to prepare a flexible, responsive, and relevant organization.

So, enjoy your reading, but do write back to us.

Dr. Usha Vyasulu Reddi

Guest Column...

National Virtual Education Plan: Enhancing Education through E-Learning in Developing Countries



Badrul H Khan, Ph.D.

In information society, there is a tremendous demand for Open, Flexible and Distributed Learning (OFDL) environment that is *affordable, efficient, easily accessible, well-designed and learner-centered*. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) facilitate the flow of information and knowledge and made it globally accessible to people at reasonable cost. Attributes and resources of ICTs in concert with learning methodologies can help us create meaningful OFDL environments.

There are numerous names for open, flexible and distributed learning (OFDL) activities, including e-Learning, Virtual Education, Open Learning, Distributed Learning (DL), Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL), Distance Learning, Online Learning (OL), Web-Based Learning (WBL), Web-Based Instruction (WBI), Web-Based Training (WBT), Internet-Based Training (IBT), Mobile Learning (or m-Learning) or Nomadic Learning, Remote Learning, Off-site Learning, etc. In this column, I use **e-learning** or virtual education to represent OFDL.

I view e-learning as an innovative approach for delivering well-designed, learner-centered, interactive, and facilitated learning environment to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilizing the attributes and resources of the Internet and digital technologies along with other forms of learning materials suited for open, flexible and distributed learning environment.

In addition to virtual education, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be used to support classroom-based learning as well. ICTs can also be used for *blended learning* (combination of traditional classroom with e-learning). According to the Virtual Colombo Plan notes, “Emerging applications of ICTs will have a profound impact on the evolution of virtual education by enabling more access to educational opportunities, enhancing the quality of teaching and reducing costs. ICTs can improve the delivery of education and broaden the range of options available for distance education, noting that policy and strategy must be tailored to local circumstances, and locally appropriate technologies found, to maximise the benefits and minimise the costs.” Application of ICT in the education systems of developing countries will continue to lag behind developments in other parts of the world unless there are interventions that increase the capacity to participate more actively. To meet the needs of education and training market today, more and more educational institutions in developing countries are likely to take advantage of ICTs to offer

virtual education. In addition, educational institutions from abroad may offer courses and degrees to education market in developing countries. These institutions need policies and standards to participate in virtual education in developing countries. To exploit the full potential of virtual education, a sound **National Virtual Education Plan (NVEP)** benefiting all strata of population, including persons with disabilities (PWDs), should be in place in each developing country.

What does it take to develop a sound National Virtual Education Plan? Well, I would say the answer to this question depends on a comprehensive understanding of “*What does it take to create a successful e-learning system that meets the needs of all stakeholders groups?*” I believe a broad understanding of all important issues of OFDL is critical to the planning of NVEP. In this column, I would *first* describe various important issues encompassing various dimensions of e-learning environment and *then* provide an outline for the development of NVEP.

My involvement in OFDL started with my genuine interest to share information and knowledge with others across the globe. While growing up in Bangladesh during the 1970s, I used to dream about having access to well-designed learning resources that were only available to students in industrial countries. In the 70s it was unthinkable that we might have equal access to those resources. In the 90s, it has become a reality. We are blessed with the emergence of the Internet's World Wide Web as one of the most important economic and democratic mediums of learning and teaching at a distance. As indicated above the Internet has become an increasingly powerful, global, interactive and dynamic medium for sharing information. The Internet provides an open, dynamic and flexible learning

environment with implications for countless applications with respect to education and training. Internet technologies provide an opportunity to develop new learning experiences for students which have not been possible before.

With the advent of the Internet and online learning methodologies and technologies, providers of education and training are creating e-learning materials to fulfill the demand. Online learning is becoming more and more accepted in workplace. Institutions are investing heavily in the development and deployment of online programs. Academic institutions, corporations, and government agencies worldwide are increasingly using the Internet and digital technologies to deliver instruction and training.

What does it take to create a successful e-learning environment for diverse learners? Well, a successful e-learning system involves a systematic process of planning, design, development, evaluation, and implementation to create an online environment where learning is actively fostered and supported. In order for an e-learning system to be successful, it must be meaningful to all stakeholder groups including learners, instructors, support services staff, and the institution.

Let's see what these stakeholders groups expect from an open, flexible and distributed learning environment. Since 1996, I have been communicating with learners, instructors, administrators, and technical and other support services staff involved in e-learning (in both academic and corporate settings) all over the world. Each stakeholder group has its own set of issues and concerns about e-learning. And they are critical! We must pay attentions to these issues if we want to be successful in e-learning. If you cluster these issues, they fall into eight categories: *institutional*,

pedagogical, technological, interface design, evaluation, management, resource support and ethical in e-learning. With these eight categories or dimensions, I developed "A Framework for E-Learning." A complete list of sub-dimensions and sections of the framework is available at <http://BooksToRead.com/framework/scroller.htm>.



If you want to know, is your e-learning program meeting the expectations of your stakeholders groups, I am sure you will get a bird's eye view of your program if you start asking questions on issues encompassing the eight dimensions. I learned that an e-learning system is meaningful to *learners* when it is easily accessible, well-designed, learner-centered, affordable, efficient, flexible, and has a facilitated learning environment. When learners display a high level of participation and success in meeting a course's goals and objectives, this can make e-learning meaningful to *instructors*. In turn, when learners enjoy all available support services provided in the course without any interruptions, it makes *support services staff* happy as they strive to provide easy-to-use, reliable services. Finally, an e-learning system is meaningful to *institutions* when it has a sound return-on-investment (ROI), a moderate to high level of learner satisfaction with both the quality of instruction and all support services, and a low drop-out rate.

Within the scope of this guest column, I would like to discuss several important issues related to each dimension of the e-learning environment. Please note that there are myriad of important items or questions encompassing the various dimensions of e-learning environment that need to be explored. As you know each e-learning project is unique. I encourage you to identify as many issues as possible for your own e-learning project by using the framework. One way to identify critical issues is by putting each stakeholder group (such as learner, instructor, support staff, etc.) at the center of the framework and raising issues along the eight dimensions of the e-learning environment. This way you can identify many critical issues that can help create meaningful e-learning environment for that particular group. By repeating the same process for other stakeholder groups, you can generate a comprehensive list of issues for your e-learning project.

Let me present some important e-learning issues (as questions) that might be raised by different stakeholders groups:

Would I be awarded the same credit for the development of an e-learning course as I would receive for the publication of an article in a professional journal or magazine? Developing a well-designed online course requires a great deal of time and effort. A non-tenure faculty (i.e., **instructor**) would probably be more interested in publishing than developing an online course if the course development does not provide any impetus toward tenure and promotion. This is a type of question an **instructor** would ask when focusing on issues relevant to *academic affairs* section of **institutional** dimension.

How often is dynamic course content updated? In designing e-learning, we need to consider the stability of course content. Content that does not need to be updated can

be categorized as *static* (e.g., historical events, grammar rules, etc.). Content that has the potential to change over time can be considered *dynamic* (e.g., laws, policies, etc.). Because dynamic content needs to be revised from time to time, it is necessary to identify such content in a course and establish an ongoing method for timely updating as needed. It will be very frustrating for *learners* if they find outdated or obsolete information. This is a type of concern that a *student* would have. This is an example of an issue relevant to *content analysis* section of **pedagogical** dimension.

Are all learning objects created for the course reusable and shareable? If your institution creates learning objects by following the international interoperability standards (such as IEEE, SCORM, etc.), they can be reused and shared by various courses within your institution and beyond. Reusable and shareable learning objects not only save money but also promote collaborations among e-learning partner institutions. This is a type of issue that an *administrator* would be interested in seeing included in the *infrastructure planning* section of **technological** dimension.

Does the course make an effort to reduce or avoid the use of jargon, idioms, ambiguous or cute humor, and acronyms? To

improve cross-cultural verbal communication and avoid misunderstanding, we should not use jokes or comments that might be misinterpreted by others. For example, in Bangladesh, we use the thumbs-up sign to challenge people, but to other cultures, that means you did well. This is a concern for *learners* with different cultural backgrounds. This is an issue relevant to *page and site design* section of **interface design** dimension.

Are students actually doing the work? How do we know we are assessing fairly and accurately? These are the types of questions will always be in the minds of *online instructors* and *administrators*. Assessment of learners at a distance can be a challenge. Issues of cheating are a major concern and an institution offering e-learning should have a mechanism in which a learner can be truly measured and not cheat.

This is an issue relevant to *assessment of learners* section of **evaluation** dimension).

Does the course have encryption (i.e., a secure coding system) available for students to send confidential information over the Internet? No institutions are immune from hackers. Academic networks can be targets of hackers if they lack security. This is a concern for *network manager* which falls under the *security measures* section of **management** dimension.

Does technical and other support staff receive training on how to communicate with remote learners in difficult situations? When students encounter repeated technical difficulties with e-learning, they become very frustrated. It is not easy for technical support staff to deal with learners in such situations. Technical staff needs training to improve their human skills. This is a concern for *technical or help line* staff. This is an issue relevant to the *online support* section of **resource support** dimension.

Are e-learning materials accessible to everyone? In designing e-learning activities, digital divide issues should be considered to include the learners who are affected by this division. E-learning providers should make equal access to e-learning resources and

National Virtual Education Plans

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Vision | 6. Content Development |
| 2. Needs Assessment | 6.1. Instructional Design and Methodology |
| 3. Virtual Education Policy | 6.2. Technology for Development of Content |
| 3.1. Technology | 7. Content Delivery |
| 3.2. Disability | 7.1. Technology for Delivery |
| 3.3. Copyright and Legal Issues | 7.2. Human Support Systems |
| 4. Virtual Education Guidelines | 7.3. Technology Support Systems |
| 4.1. Faculty | 8. Evaluation |
| 4.2. Students | 8.1. Dashboard of Success Indicators (what will success look like?) |
| 4.3. Partnership with Others | 8.2. Formative Evaluation |
| 4.4. Credit Transfers | 8.2.1. Evaluation of Content Development |
| 4.5. Compliance with Virtual Education Policy | 8.2.2. Pilot Testing |
| 5. Resources and Finance | 8.3. Summative Evaluation |
| 5.1. Budget | 8.3.1. External Measurement |
| 5.2. Human Resources | 8.3.2. Accreditation |
| 5.3. Content Available | 8.4. Assessment of Learners |
| 5.4. Equipment | 8.5. Instructor Evaluation |
| 5.5. Existing Infrastructure | 8.6. Technology and Support Services Evaluation |
| 5.6. Time | |
| 5.7. Potential Participants | |
| 5.8. Administration | |
| 5.9. Funding Sources | |

materials to wider population. Since the loading speed on the Internet may vary with users' Internet connection speeds, e-learning designers should use multimedia elements that are essential to content. E-learning designers need to respect differences in bandwidth. Individuals with slow and unreliable Internet connections have to wait longer time to download large files which is very frustrating. Since images and videos without text alternatives are inaccessible to learners who are visually impaired for any reason, the use of alternate text for all non-text elements is essential in this regard. This is an ethical concern for *administrators* and *institution* when it comes to issues relevant to *digital divide* section of *ethical* dimension.

As you can see there are numerous issues that might be of concern to your stakeholder groups, most specifically the learners your e-learning customers. You may be thinking—*how many issues do I have to address? how many issues are necessary?* It depends on the goals and scope of your project? The more e-learning issues you explore and address, the more meaningful and supportive a learning environment you help to create for your target population. If you want your e-learning programs to be marketable beyond your campus to the world. As you venture into global market, your scope of operation is extended. With this extended market, you have more issues to address for geographically diverse customers (i.e., learners).

Designing open, flexible, and distributed e-learning systems for diverse learners is challenging; however, as more and more institutions offer e-learning to learners worldwide, we will become more knowledgeable about what works and what does not work. We should try our best to

accommodate the needs of stakeholder groups by asking as many critical questions as possible along the eight dimensions of e-learning environment. The number and types of questions may vary based on each unique e-learning system. Given our specific e-learning contexts, we may not be able to address all the critical issues within the eight dimensions of e-learning. We should find ways to address them with the best possible means that we can afford. It is important to ask many questions as possible during the planning period of e-learning design.


I hope that several examples of issues encompassing the eight dimensions of the E-Learning Framework discussed above provide a snapshot of what an e-learning environment looks like. I believe that communities around the globe can benefit from the E-Learning Framework when developing their National Virtual Education Plans. The framework can provide guidance for countries to create their virtual education plans with specific focus on local circumstances and locally available technologies. Countries should think globally and act locally for preparing their virtual education materials. The framework provides as examples of graphical representation of national virtual education models, I have created the following images for Bangladesh and India based on my E-Learning Framework,



Finally, in this column, I outline major elements of a virtual education plan (in sidebar) which can be used by developing countries for their **National Virtual Education Plans (NVEPs)**.

Important issues within the eight dimensions of the E-Learning Framework should be considered in planning for each element of NVEP.

In conclusion, I hope that developing countries will consider creating their own virtual education plans, and enhance their education by appropriately utilizing learning methodologies and technologies that best suit their national visions. I am very interested in assisting developing countries to develop their National Virtual Education Plans.

Badrul H. Khan, Ph.D., is an international speaker, author, educator and consultant in the field of distributed learning. Dr. Khan has been instrumental in creating a coherent framework for open, flexible and distributed learning. In his first book, *Web-Based Instruction* (1997), he took a leadership role in defining the critical dimensions of this new field of inquiry and practice at all levels of education and training. Reflecting its enormous acceptance worldwide, *Web-Based Instruction* has become a bestseller and has been adopted by colleges and universities worldwide. His other books include, *Web-Based Training*, *E-Learning Strategies*, *E-Learning QUICK Checklist*, and *Web-Based Learning*. Founder of *BooksToRead.com* and Professor and Program Director of Educational Technology Leadership Cohort program at George Washington University. His Website is www.BadrulKhan.com/khan. 

Spotlight on...

Centre for Media Studies: Independent Multi-disciplinary Development Research Centre



Centre for Media Studies (CMS) is an independent, not for profit national level multi-disciplinary development

research and facilitative body of eminent professionals nationally known for its advocacy initiatives. The Centre has been set up with an objective to tap and integrate various sources of information, analysis and initiate research towards a more informed decision.

CMS's original thrust was to focus on media strategies, motivation and communication (IEC) trends, considering the all-encompassing influence of media in particular and the field of communication in general. Now, *it has expanded its horizon of activities to include social, environmental and developmental issues.*

Today, CMS has emerged as an inter-disciplinary research group with wide interest and capability in the areas of social research, communication research, public opinion surveys and operation research. The centre emphasises *on research, monitoring, evaluation and advocacy for policy and planning.* It also organises dialogue and debate on important public issues, disseminates research findings to contribute to knowledge and understanding of society and thus helps in better-informed decision-making.

Vision

"Research is not an end in itself, rather it is a means for change, the betterment of society and to promote equity in people."

Mission

Going beyond the conventional concerns of research and analysis, CMS mission includes advocacy,

planning, promoting peoples' participation, facilitating interface between different sections of the society, and sensitising the public on issues of national concern. The motto of CMS is "objective



information gathering and analysis" which can contribute to a better society.

CMS' Division

In the due course of time, CMS has developed expertise in various disciplines.

Discipline	Specialisation
Health	Health Infrastructure/ RCH/ Public Health/ AIDS/STD/ Economics/IEC/ Immunisation/Adolescent girls/ Patients satisfaction
Education	Adult Education/Vocational Education/Primary Education/ Tracer Study
Rural Development	Irrigation/Training Needs/Tribal Development/Water Supply & Sanitation
Social Development	Women and Child Development/Food Security/Child labour
Environment	Environmental Education/IEC/Evaluation/ Assessment Studies
Communication	Developing Communication strategies, Communication Needs Assessment, Concurrent, Mid-term and End line Evaluation of Programmes on Electronic media, Training on Behavioural Change Communication/ Communication Skills

CMS Social

CMS has identified research on social development as a priority area of study so that the knowledge and understanding of social development issues can lead to better informed decision-making and formulation of more realistic social policies.

CMS' spheres of research expertise in the broad area of social development include Public Health, Poverty, Rural and Urban Development, Women and Child Development, Education, Labour, Social Welfare, Social Security, Social Safety Net, Housing and Social Justice issues. Social dimensions of development projects and their impact on tribal and rural populations, employment and environment are other areas of concern. CMS has extensive expertise in evaluating social development programmes and conducting feasibility studies prior to launching of social programmes.

CMS Communication

Communication is a vital element in any development activity as it prepares people for change and development, provides information on key areas and helps in decision-making. Studies of a varied nature such as assessing communication needs, designing social messages, social marketing strategies and evaluating campaigns and programmes of development are undertaken by CMS.

CMS has been an active player in the rapidly changing media scene in the country. Through numerous research studies and organising interaction between experts, CMS has been striving for the betterment of electronic media in the country. In the field of business communication, CMS has been regularly monitoring advertising in

different media and undertaken readership and viewer ship studies, thus serving as a national forum for initiatives in this regard. Creating awareness, ensuring people's participation and making them active citizen is the ultimate objective of IEC studies of CMS.



Recently CMS has also giving training on Behavioural Change Communication in RCH programmes to NGO personnel.

CMS Environment Division
Environment division of CMS has been working closely with Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in reviewing effectiveness and identifying missing links in implementation strategies for environmental protection.

CMS have been empanelled under MoEF for undertaking concurrent evaluation of the various schemes initiated by the Ministry. In recognition of its contribution, and pioneering work in the area of media awareness, evaluation and social development, Centre for Media Studies (CMS) has been made an "ENVIS CENTRE" in the country by the MoEF for Communication Strategies, specifically in the context of the electronic media. The basic objective is to collect, classify, retrieve, and disseminate information in the subject area allotted to decision-makers, policy-planners, scientists, research community, students, etc. all over the country.

CMS ENVIS Centre had also organized country's first Environment & Wild Life Film festival "VATAVARAN-2002" at Siri Fort Auditorium in April 8-9, 2002.

The SDNP Node at CMS collected and supplied information on environment and media relating to sustainable development to Universities, Registered Societies, all private bodies or State Government Departments. Now the same is continued as ENVIS Node under World Bank assisted Environment management Capacity Building Technical Assistance Project (EMCBTAP).

The Centre also publishes a quarterly Newsletter on Communication and Electronic Media with the aim to network NGOs and professionals involved in environment, development, communication and media related programmes.

CMS Academy

The continuous process of updating its expertise and knowledge has been formalized with the creation of CMS Academy which conducts seminars, training and advocacy programs for professionals in the fields of social development, particularly to do with communication campaign and media strategies.

CMS design programmes that enable participants to develop their communication skills through completing challenging projects, applying theory, using participatory methods, interactions with experts, taking part in facilitated reviews and feedback. Communication skills programmes are designed to ensure integration of relevant project knowledge, practices and maximise the transfer of learning.


CMS also has developed manpower-training modules, conducted workshops and has undertaken preparation of operational manuals for field level functionaries and studies for reorganization and restructuring. The CMS Academy has an ongoing program, supported by PFI, for Training NGOs working on RCH issues, on *Management Skills* and on *Behavioral Change Communication*.

CMS believes that research findings on issues of national concern should be disseminated to all concerned for their effective use. CMS achieves this objective by organising seminars and bringing out monographs. The monograph series on Family Planning Communication, Rural Development Communication and Emerging Trends in Mass Media have been widely appreciated.

Seminars and workshops organized by CMS are attended by social activists, public representatives, senior administrators, subject specialists, eminent journalists, jurists', Voluntary Organizations, Government and international government representatives, etc. In these activities, CMS seeks active



association with concerned bodies like National Commission for Women, National Commission for Human Rights, Press Council, etc. for ensuring follow-up.

Other events in this area include seminar series on "*Social Effects of Electronic Media*" around the country and special '*Sensitization Workshops for the Media Professionals on Issues Regarding Children*'. Recently CMS has conducted training programme on '*Communication & Presentation Skills*' for guides and rickshaw pullers at Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary for World Wide Life Fund and Nature & Forest Department. 

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Case Study...

Mobile Internet Unit (MIU) - Multimedia Cyber-Learning Station: The Malaysian Experience

Rozhan M. Idrus

Overview

The Mobile Internet Unit (MIU) is a development project on computer-mediated education for school teachers and students, as well as people in rural and urban marginalized communities. The MIU originated in Malaysia as a project lead by the MIMOS Berhad since Nov. 1998 and the first operational MIU unit was launched in August 1999. Also involved in the project are several strategic partners, including organizations such as the Malaysian National IT Council (NITC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) / Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP), Automotive Corporation Malaysia (ACM/HICOM) and the Ministry of Education of Malaysia (MOE) and



professionals from the fields of education, IT experts, University and secondary school teachers and some other private sector organizations.

The MIU is basically a self-contained coach, consisting of several MIU basic ICT literacy training modules, a set of project evaluation pack, local area networked computers, a content-rich server, modems, routers, LCD projectors, a pull down screen, colour television, CD player, cassette players, PA systems, digital camera, polaroid camera, other audio visual aids, colour and laser printer, fax machines, scanner, courseware, software, reference books and other facilities. The MIU

is driven by a driver-cum-facilitator and a co-driver-cum-team leader and it goes round the non-mainstream schools (Non-main stream schools are schools that are deprived of access to information and opportunity to acquire ICT skills) to conduct basic ICT Literacy Programs.

Objectives

The main objectives of the mobile Internet unit are:

- promote ICT awareness & literacy among the teachers and students in non-main stream schools.
- assess and collect data on IT potential / capacity of the teachers & students in these schools.
- provide electronic classroom experiences for these schools.
- assess the impact of ICT on the teaching & learning processes in the new environment.

The Mobile Unit

"APDIP was thinking of an old bus. But we decided if we were going to do this, we might, as well do it right. After all, this is Malaysia, home of the world's tallest building!. We wanted to generate excitement about the project to draw the people to IT. We felt challenged to come up with a total solution, and that's how the Mobile Internet Unit (MIU) developed."

It became a "Malaysia Boleh" (Malaysia Can Do It) effort for the local experts who pitched in to help. UNDP provided a US\$75,000 grant (RM285, 000) but DRB-Hicom donated the luxury coach worth RM620,000 and Mimos and Hup Lee Coachbuilders Sdn Bhd designed the bus to fit 20 Pentium III computers.

A team of 40 experts from Mimos Bhd, Hup Lee Coachbuilders Sdn Bhd And Automotive Corporation (M) Sdn Bhd (ACM) worked on a tight deadline to put out a

roadworthy working model. Everyone involved was proud to say that it was a 100 per cent "made-in-Malaysia" project using local materials, designers, engineers and information technology experts - the only imported component was the complete-knocked-down bus chassis from Japan which was assembled locally.

This was the first time Mimos Bhd Creative Design Centre (CDC) had been asked to design a bus to be used as a mobile classroom to teach



IT, said CDC manager Alias Ibrahim. More used to designing web pages, brochures and trade booths, it was quite a challenge for the team to design a bus but knowing the benefits gave them a sense of purpose, said Alias. "We knew the cyber coach will benefit the nation, but realising the chain reaction it could ignite in other developing countries inspired our imagination." Using a "living-in-small-spaces" concept, the team had to find a way to utilise every square centimetre of available space to give an atmosphere similar to a cyber cafe.

The team of designers was dedicated to the project and senior designer Hizbollah Kampo Rajo even spent nights at the office researching the designs, said Alias. Working hand-in-hand with the coach builders, factors such as the maximum number of computer stations conducive to student comfort, power supply and ventilation had to be looked into.

Other details looked into included designing cabinets to hold computers and other equipment and making sure things don't fall out when the bus is on the move. The bus has 20 workstations, foldable seats, overhead storage bins, book shelves, TV, pull down screen, printer, fax machines, slide projectors public address system, fridge and a toilet. Two generators provide power supply and powerful air-conditioning units keep the computer and equipment in working

order while the bus is wired up with an alarm system. Hup Lee general manager Khaw Soy Ou and engineer Rostam Abdul Manaf looked into the practical aspects of refurbishing the bus to make the MIU more "down to earth".

Ergonomics - the study of the relationship between people and their working environment - was a prime consideration in figuring out comfort levels in a confined space. Team leader Khaw said "Although we have been in the coach-building business for 30 years, this is the first time we have been asked to fit a bus for a mobile classroom. After listening to the proposal we felt it was a good idea, and, as engineers, we knew it could be done.

The bus engine provides power supply for the air-conditioning when the bus is mobile while the generators would be used to provide electricity when it is parked. Mind-boggling details such as zig-zag arrangement of workstations, bolting everything onto the desktop and covering up windows to cut out glare were attended to.

The Operation

The biggest of the three buses, equipped with 20 PCs, visits 20 schools without computer facilities in central Selangor state while the two smaller ones, with 12 computers each, visit another 20 schools in the capital. "The response is fantastic, very positive," says Kang Wai Chin, the MIU project manager in Mimos.

The buses visit a school once a fortnight and spend the whole day on site, says Kang. A typical morning session sees five groups of 20 pupils and teachers, spending one hour each on the bus. A couple of trainers from Mimos provide the groups with hands-on training on the basics of PCs and the Internet. Afternoons are reserved for open sessions for another 40 pupils, teachers and parents. The buses make 10 fortnightly visits to each school, apart from pre-training briefing and post-training evaluation visits.

Each pupil in the group is thus given about ten hours hands-on exposure on the computers. "Our objective is to reach as many people as possible," Kang said. It may just provide a taste of the Internet, but Kang says the



excitement and enthusiasm it generates is infectious.

At the end of a series of training sessions in a school, it is common to find the school head and the parent-teacher association chipping in to buy more PCs to add to the Internet-ready PC that the project team leaves behind. Critics, however, argue it is more pressing

Facilities in the Mobile Internet Unit

- IT Equipments
- 20 multimedia Pentium personal computers
- 1 server (400 MHz DualP, 8.6 GB HD)+ back up systems 1,
- 24 ports hub (10/100 Base T)
- 1 UPS
- 1 modem
- 1 digital handset
- 1 generator (compact portable AC/DC Diesel Generator 4,800 watts)
- 1 digital camera
- 1 digital video camera
- 1 colour portable camera
- 1 portable colour printer
- 1 laser printer
- 1 portable photocopiers LCD projector
- ICT Modules
- Basic Computing Skills (files & folders management, word processing, spread sheet
- Basic Internet Skills (finding useful information, sending & receiving emails, designing & publishing own information)
- Basic Multimedia Production (simple computer graphics, video & audio incorporation)

to resolve basic rural needs before going for high-tech projects such as Smart Schools and mobile Internet units.

School Selection Criteria

- schools are selected from all the nine districts in Selangor.
- non- Computer-In-Education (CIE) schools
- non- Smart Schools.
- schools without computing facilities (given preference)
- support & commitment from

State Education Department, school administration, staff & PTA (Parents Teachers Association)

Responses

When the bus visits Syed Mashor School in the small town of Batang Kali more than two hours north of Kuala Lumpur, students clamour to board it. "It's a golden opportunity for us," says teacher Abdul Razak Yusoff, who is also the secretary of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). "We've only heard about the Internet-about 50 percent of the country doesn't know what it is. Especially in the rural areas, there can be a sense of being left out. In this school, the PTA pushed for a computer club and for the children to attend lessons."

Zulfendi Zulhisam is a 13-year-old, Malaysian aborigine (Orang Asli) of the Mah Meri tribe, lives in Sungai Pelek village, a three-hour drive from the capital Kuala Lumpur. Zulfendi's aspirations contrast with his setting. He wants to be an engineer when he grows up. But first, he declares, "I want to learn how to build web pages." His interest was sparked when a huge silver bus, or Mobile Internet Unit, started visiting his school in Sungai Pelek. Inside the bus was an exciting new world: rows of monitor screens, trendy headsets and buttons that prompted silver disks to pop out. It was his first encounter with computers. After 10 sessions of basic computing and Internet skills, the precocious Zulfendi stated that while he was initially scared of computers, "I'm used to them now." Zulfendi is among 2,400 students and 400 teachers in the state of Selangor to benefit from this MIU. **ECA**

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 Hanizah Hashim, Teamwork and spirit the driving force of project, *New Straits Times*, Wednesday, 1 September 1999

The Case Study has been compiled and synthesised by Dr. Rozhan M. Idrus, Associate Professor at the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Penang, Malaysia.

BiblioFile...

Ramanujam, P.R. (2002) *Distance and Open Learning: Challenges to Developing Countries*, Shipra: New Delhi ISBN: 81-7541-098-1

Distance education has been practiced by more than 1300 institutions in about 130 countries offering 70,000 odd courses to nearly 90 million students with varied academic, economic and cultural backgrounds. While the successful, well-equipped and competitive institutions of open learning in the advanced countries are merrily marching ahead under the banner of globalization, the under-fed institutions in the developing countries stand at a cross road. This book provides an incisive analysis and critical perspective on the factors affecting developments of open distance learning in developing countries.

Kumar, Shailendra (2003) *European Libraries in the New Millennium (V-Book)*, SoftLink Asia: New Delhi, ISBN: 81-88797-00-6

A practical and easy to use V-book CD package, this book guides the reader through the video, images and scrolling text of library organization and technology supported activities. The one hour and twenty minutes hypermedia CD presents actual set-up of library and information centres, LIS education and step-by-step orientation of library and use of information technology. It is one of first of its kind in India.

Panda, Santosh (ed) (2003) *Planning and Management in Distance Education*, Kogan Page: London ISBN: 0-7494-4068-6

Distance education and training is being adopted throughout the world as a cost-effective, flexible answer to widening access for all. The book provides critical reflections, experiences and research on how to balance quality management and quality learning. Topics covered include: policy and planning, institutional management, management of processes, quality assurance and accreditations and internationalization.

Albalooshi, Fawzi (Ed) (2003) *Virtual Education: Cases in Learning and Teaching Technologies*, IRM Press: Hershey ISBN: 1-931777-39-X

Advances in technology are making virtual education a force for use in today's universities. And, the further technology advances and changes, the more opportunities and requirements there are within organizations to implement and adopt the technologies in support of the on-going mission to create effective and efficient environments. This book examines the challenges and issues that universities face when implementing and utilizing virtual education technologies. **ECA**

Research shows...

Online Education in the U.S.

A recent survey by "The Sloan Consortium" reports the following findings:

- Over 1.6 million students took at least one online course during Fall 2002.
- Over one-third of these students (578,000) took all of their courses online.
- Among all U.S. higher education students in Fall 2002, 11 percent took at least one online course.
- Among those students at institutions where online courses were offered, 13 percent took at least one online course.
- The number of students taking at least one online course is projected to increase by 19.8

percent over the one-year period from Fall 2002 to Fall 2003, to include a total of 1.9 million students.

- Eighty-one percent of all institutions of higher education offer at least one fully online or blended course.
- Complete online degree programs are offered by 34 percent of the institutions.
- A majority of academic leaders (57 percent) already believe that the learning outcomes for online education are equal to or superior to those of face-to-face institution. **ECA**

Source: Allen, I. E. and Seaman, J. (Sept. 2003) Sizing the Opportunity: The quality and Extent of Online Education in the United States, 2002 and 2003. Olin Way, Needham: Sloan-C

Regional Roundup...

Forum on ICTs & Gender: Optimising Opportunities, Kuala Lumpur

COL, the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), Canada's



International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the International Telecommunications Union and the Government of Malaysia (Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia, the Ministry of Women and Family Development and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission) organised an invitational forum on ICTs and gender at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 20-23 August 2003.


Participation at this event was by invitation only. Topics included the areas of "Confidence & Security in the Use of ICTs", "Health & Education", "SME/Entrepreneurship" and "Rural & Disadvantaged Groups". Several other agencies also supported the Forum. The Forum brought together public, private and not-for-profit stakeholders for the purpose of creating awareness about and a greater appreciation of the gender-related barriers that exist in developing and developed countries, to discuss strategies for overcoming these barriers, and to develop an understanding of why women need access to ICTs. It is anticipated that the awareness and appreciation will translate into policies that support women's access to ICTs, as well as

networking which will enhance women's participation in the information economy, especially in the developing world.

There were over three hundred participants attending the Forum, most from developing countries. Through support provided by COL and its partners, GKP, IDRC, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and infoDev, many women from

developing regions of the Commonwealth were enabled to attend the Forum, and contribute to the proceedings.

All expressed their thanks and appreciation for the opportunity to gain and share knowledge and experiences through the presentations and discussions.

Source: <http://www.col.org/wdd/> 

UkeU Courses in Malaysia

Inti Management Services Sdn Bhd (IMS) and UK eUniversities



Worldwide Limited (UKeU) have signed a memorandum of agreement (MoA) to market and support the online provision of degree courses from British universities. With the agreement, IMS will be UKeU's accredited partner for Malaysia in offering online degree courses from renowned universities in Britain.

A government-backed company, UKeU brings together leading-edge information and communications technologies via the Internet and World Wide Web to deliver interactive, managed-learning environments globally. Designed for individuals and students who desire to pursue their professional development, the alliance will set the pathway for the introduction of

four programmes -- MSc in Tourism and Travel Management from the University of Nottingham, MSc in Biomedical Science from the University of Ulster, MSc in Information Technology and Management from Sheffield Hallam University, and MSc in Computer Science from the University of Hertfordshire.

IMS centre director Yee Wee Chun said more programmes were being lined up and that the synergistic linkage between IMS and UKeU will provide Malaysians with wider choice and flexibility to further their education.


Source: <http://star-techcentral.com> 

Prof. V. S. Prasad at NAAC

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), a registered society of the University Grants Commission (UGC),



responsible for monitoring and maintaining standards and accreditation of colleges and universities in India, has Prof. V. S. Prasad as its new Director.

Prof. Prasad brings decades of experience to this position, including more than 30 years as teachers in the higher education system in India. Prior to this assignment, he was Vice-Chancellor of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University at Hyderabad, and acting Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi national Open University, New Delhi. Through his writings and research, Prof. Prasad has emerged as a thinker, scholar and administrator with a vision for quality higher education in the recent past. Readers may recall that he contributed the Guest Column of the last issue of *EduComm Asia* on "Quality Higher Education". We congratulate Prof. Prasad, and wish him all the best in his new assignment. 

Worth While Web...

*The Internet and its World Wide Web has become a great source of information. However, finding quality and reliable information is still a problem. In this issue we focus on **Free Electronic Journals on Education and related areas**. We hope these links would be useful to you in design and developments of electronic discussion groups. All the links were working fine at the time of going to the press.*

The AASA Professor:
<http://www.aasa.org/publications/tap/index.htm>

Academe:
<http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/>

Academic Leadership:
<http://www.academicleadership.org/>

Australian Educational Computing:
<http://www.acce.edu.au/journal/>

Australian Journal of Educational Technology:
<http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet.html>

Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy:
<http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/>

Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology:
<http://www.cjlt.ca>

Converge:
<http://www.centerdigtaled.com/converge/>

Current Issues in Education:
<http://cie.asu.edu/index.html>

Education Policy Analysis Archives:
<http://epaa.asu.edu/>

Educational Researcher:
<http://www.aera.net/pubs/er/>

Educational Technology and Society:
<http://ifets.ieee.org/periodical/>

Electronic Journal of Science Education:
<http://www.eastern.edu/publications/emme/>

Interactive Multimedia Electronic Journal of Computer-Enhanced Learning:
<http://imej.wfu.edu/>

International Education Journal:
<http://wwwed.sturt.flinders.edu.au/iej/>

International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning:
<http://www.irrodl.org/>

Journal of Career and Technical Education:
<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JCTE/>

Journal of Educational Enquiry:
<http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/JEE/>

Journal of Interactive Media in Education:
<http://www-jime.open.ac.uk/>

Journal of Research for Educational Leaders:
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~jrel/>

Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning:
<http://titans.iusb.edu/josotl/>

Journal of Special Education Technology:
<http://jset.unlv.edu>

Networks: An On-line Journal for Teacher Research:
<http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~ctd/networks/>

New Horizons for Learning Online Journal:
<http://www.newhorizons.org/journal/newjournal.htm>

Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation:
<http://edresearch.org/pare/Home.htm>

T.H.E. Journal:
<http://www.thejournal.com/>

Teacher Magazine:
<http://www.teachermagazine.org/>

Training Journal:
<http://www.trainingjournal.com/>

Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education:
<http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/>

Compiled from the World Wide Web by Sanjaya Mishra, PhD 

Encouraging Doctoral Research in Media

In order to promote doctoral research in educational media, CEMCA invites research scholars to undertake research on utilization of educational media, and in various other areas of media and learning. A modest funding will be given to cover survey and report writing work. Registered research scholars are requested to apply in the application format, which can be available from the **Director, CEMCA**

Educational Media Consultants

CEMCA is in the process of developing a database of Educational Media Consultants in the region to promote the exchange of professionals and utilise the expertise available within the region. For inclusion in the database send your resume to Director, CEMCA or register online at <http://www.cemca.org>.

Technology Tracking...

The Art of Blogging - Part 2

Getting Started, "How To", Tools, Resources

George Siemens

This is the second and last part of the **Technology Tracking** on Blogging. This second part should be read along with the Part 1 published in June 2003 issue of **EduComm Asia**.

Getting Started

The best way to learn to blog is to blog. Fortunately, getting started is fairly simple. Three main options exist: *hosted*, *remote server*, and *desktop*. A hosted service is the easiest and quickest way to start. Services like **Blogger** allow new users to set up an account (for free or a premium version for \$35 per year) and begin posting literally in a matter of minutes. Blogger can host the blog, or the user can post to his/her own site. A remotely installed blog is perhaps the most involved to setup. **Movabletype** allows users to install on a server (free for non-commercial, \$150 for commercial). Some technical skills are required to configure the blog and database. Documentation, however, is excellent for Movabletype. Installation is also offered for a fee. Desktop blog programs are installed on a user's computer, and posts are then uploaded to a host. **Radio Userland** is a desktop program for \$35.95, which includes hosting and upgrades for a year. Start up process for desktop blogs is almost as simple as hosted services like Blogger.

Blogger, Movabletype, and Radio



Userland are only a sampling of available blog programs. Webcrimson (<http://webcrimson.com>), greymatter (<http://www.noahgrey.com/greysoft/>), Drupal (<http://www.drupal.org>), and Tinderbox (<http://www.eastgate.com/Tinderbo>

x/) are also available. For a complete listing of blog resources, visit Blogroots (<http://www.blogroots.com/resources.blog>).

Once your blog has been setup, you're ready to start blogging! Getting your blog noticed takes some time...but linking to other bloggers, posting comments on their sites, engaging in dialogue, and "pinging" (an option available on most blogs) sites like Weblogs (<http://www.weblogs.com>) help to increase recognition. **How to Publicize Your Blog** (<http://www.blogger.com/howto/publicize.pyre>) offers some great concepts for increasing readership. Interesting, provocative writing, however, is the best way to get noticed.

Examples

Reading other blogs is an excellent way to learn - not only about the content being blogged, but about the process of blogging. Selecting a variety of blogs and writing styles affords a broad perspective of how to use the medium. Some bloggers of note:

- News: Scripting News (<http://www.scripting.com>)
- Links/Commentary: elearnspaceblog (<http://www.elearnspace.org/cgi-bin/elearnspaceblog/>), OLDaily (<http://www.dpwines.ca/news/OLDaily.htm>)
- Editorial: InstaPundit (<http://www.instupundit.com>)
- Technology: Bluetooth (<http://bluetooth.weblogs.com>)
- New Media/journalism: Hypergene Media Blog (<http://www.hypergene.net/blog/weblog.php>)
- Audio: Audioblog News (<http://radio.weblogs.com/0100368>)
- Education: SchoolBlogs (<http://www.schoolblogs.com>)

This sampling of blogs reveals an important issue: blogs are used as a tool (replacement?) for virtually every type of traditional media, communication, and interaction. Blogs have infiltrated broad areas of the Internet and appear to be poised for significant, "overnight" success and adoption. Where the Internet is about availability of information, blogging is about making information creation available to anyone.

How to blog

Writing effective blogs is similar to effective writing for traditional media. While sentence construction, basic grammar, and spelling are important, bloggers are often more concerned about communicating concepts. Writing rules are employed (and broken) to the degree that they support effective communication of a message. However, some differences do exist. Traditional writing is audience focused. Bloggers often write primarily for themselves or for a small group - as a way of organizing thoughts, sharing information, or creating a personal resource of links (as compared to a monolithic "Favorites" folder). The Internet is also more dynamic and media-rich than traditional media. Bloggers can incorporate audio, video, animations, and pictures...hyperlinks are also used to create connections between information and ideas.

The following is a list of guidelines for beginning bloggers:

1. **Start.** As stated earlier, blogging is best learned by blogging...and by reading other bloggers. So...start.
2. **Know your motivation.** Why are you blogging? What do you hope to achieve?
3. **Link.** The heart of blogging is linking...linking and commenting. Connecting and communicating - the purpose of the Internet.
4. **Experiment.** Developing a writing style is an evolutionary process. Try different approaches and formats until you find one that fits your message, audience, and personal motivations.
5. **Use life** and your experiences as your "idea generation" file.

6. **Get an opinion.** Then express it.
7. **Express your personality...**let your humour, your perspective on life, and your values shine in your writing.
8. **Post regularly.** This is important - readers drop off/lose interest with irregular blogs (syndication and aggregators allow blog readers to stay in touch with infrequently updated blogs - more on that in the section "Extending Blogs").
9. **Keep writing clear and concise.** Avoid jargon...but utilize the unique aspects of the medium (visual, links, sound). Focus on communication (function) before form.
10. **Write for a reason,** not recognition. Most bloggers have small audiences. Satisfaction is derived from the writing process, not the audience response.

Tools & Resources for Blogging

As you progress in blogging, you may find increased interest in additional tools to enhance your blog. Many resources are



available...and the list is expanding continually. Here's a few resources to consider:

- eatonweb - Extensive resource page, including definitions, tools, books, and courses
- Microcontent News - Covers: "the microcontent sector: weblogs, Webzines, email digests, and personal publishing.. as well as how weblogs combine to form the Blogosphere."
- Blogroots - An excellent resource listing tools, accessories, directories, and books
- Blogging Software Roundup - You can get lost in this list! Lots of information
- Weblogs Compendium - Tools - Extensive list of blog tools

- elearnspace - blogs - Listing of blog resources and articles
- Library Weblogs - Link-rich resource, focused, but not limited to, libraries
- Weblog to Moblog - Nice overview article of mobile blogs
- Code of Ethics - Short article addressing an important consideration for all bloggers - ethics
- History of Weblogs - See also Dave Winer's take on blog history

Extending Blogs - Aggregating

A few days (or even hours!) of searching the blogosphere can overwhelm newcomers. The amount of information is incredible. How can a user keep track of various blogs? It seems impossible to stay in touch with more than a hand full of bloggers each day. Fortunately, a solution exists to simplify the process of reading large numbers of blogs: RSS (rich (or RDF) site summary). Some articles detailing RSS/syndication and aggregators:

"RSS is a way of creating a broadcast version of a blog or news page. Anyone who has frequently updated content and is willing to let others republish it can create the RSS file. Typically called syndication, the RSS file is an XML formatted file that can be used at other sites or by other



intermediary software such as news aggregators. The original incarnation was to use RSS to include several headlines on a personalized portal page. But an RSS feed can also be easily pulled into other functions, such as an aggregator."


The Blog Realm: RSS, Aggregators, and Reading the Blog Fantastic (<http://www.infotoday.com/online/nov02/OnTheNet.htm>)
"Content developers make their RSS files available by placing them

on their web server. In this way, RSS "aggregators" are able to read the RSS files and therefore to collect data about the website. These aggregators place the site information into a larger database and use this database to allow for structured searches of a large number of content providers. Because the data is in XML, and not a display language like HTML, RSS information can be flowed into a large number of devices. In addition to being used to create news summary web pages, RSS can be fed into stand-alone news browsers or headline viewers, PDAs, cell phones, email ticklers and even voice updates. The strength of RSS is its simplicity. It is exceptionally easy to syndicate website content using RSS. It is also very easy to use RSS headline feeds, either by viewing a news summary web page or by downloading one of many free headline viewers. Though most RSS feeds list web based resources, several feeds link to audio files, video files and other multimedia."

An Introduction to RSS for Educational Designers (http://www.downes.ca/files/RSS_Educ.doc)

Through the use of RSS, bloggers can keep up to date with a large number of blogs. The link to the RSS file can simply be added to an aggregator. The aggregator then searches the RSS files and generates a page listing posts and topics since the last visit. A user can view large amounts of news/information in a very short period of time.

Conclusion

The simplest innovations are often the most effective in responding to ground swells of trends and change. The potency of the blog phenomenon is two fold: perfect match for its medium and ease of use. 

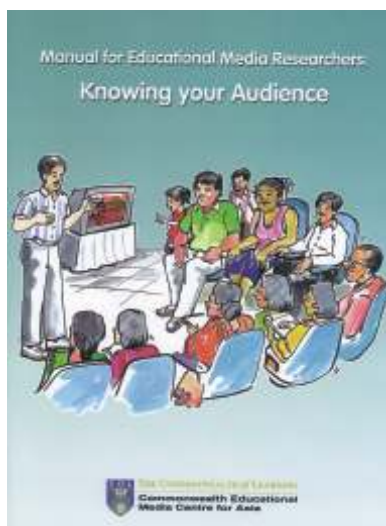
George Siemens, an instructor at Red River College (<http://www.rrc.mb.ca>) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He can be reached at gsiemens@rrc.mb.ca. Published with permission from elearnspace.org site maintained by the author. Original version can be found at http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/blogging_part_2.htm.

CEMCA News...

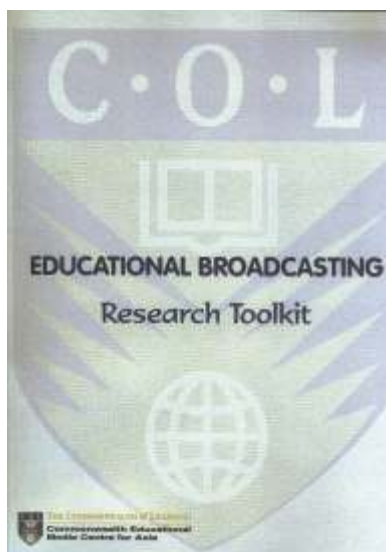
New Publication

Educational Broadcasting Research Toolkit has been published by CEMCA for improving the quality of educational broadcasting programmes in the Commonwealth countries in general and the Asian Region in particular. The toolkit includes the following:

- A monograph entitled “*Know Your Audience: A manual for Educational Media Researchers*” by *Usha V. Reddi* and *Jagdish Singh*; and




- Seven Media Research Capsules



The media research capsules are:
 MRC-1: Pre-Production Research by *Mira B. Aghi*
 MRC-2: Prototype Production Research by *D. Rukmini Vemraju*
 MRC-3: Feedback Research and monitoring of Broadcasts by *Sunil Mishra*
 MRC-4: Critical Review of Exiting Materials vis-à-vis the Project Objectives by *Arbind Sinha*
 MRC-5: Experimental Research Method in Media Research by *Akshilesh Kumar Singh*
 MRC-6: Action Research and Participatory Research by *Usha V. Reddi* and *Jagdish Singh*
 MRC-7: Monitoring Utilization of the Broadcasts and Studying Factors Affecting Utilization by *Abhilasha Kumari*

The toolkit is targeted to those institutions that have a need to know, but do not have the resources and luxury of time to commission expensive market research firms. It is designed to be useful as much for the experienced media researcher as for the beginners; for a large media house and even for a small outfit with a handful of staff.

To receive copies of the *Educational Broadcasting Research Toolkit*, send your request to Director, CEMCA at cemca@nda.vsnl.net.in 

Staff News



Mr. Dalip Kumar Tetri joined CEMCA as Head, Administration & Finance in July 2003.

He holds a Master's Degree in Arts from HP University, Shimla, Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education from Indira Gandhi National Open University and Professional qualifications of Subordinate

Accounts Services and Revenue Audit Examination from the Comptroller & Auditor General of India.

He brings with him a versatile experience of 36 years in the Indian Audit & Accounts Department, the Ministry of Communications, Government of India and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). Prior to joining CEMCA, he was working with IGNOU as Joint Registrar, and played a pioneering role in designing, developing and implementing systems in the Finance & Accounts division. He has contributed Chapters to the Manuals of Operations for Regional and Study center functionaries and framed a Scheme for Decentralization of Operations to Regional centers. He also contributed extensively in organizing and conducting training programmes for the benefit of headquarters and Regional/Study centers' staff.



Mr. Nimal T. Fernando completed his term as Programme Officer (Broadcast Media) at CEMCA and

left for Sri Lanka at the end of June 2003.



Dr. Sanjaya Mishra, Programme Officer at CEMCA also completed his term at CEMCA and joined back Staff training and Research Institute of

Distance Education at IGNOU in July 2003.

We at CEMCA wish both of them a bright future. 

SMART Tips...

Using Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) Methodologies

Jagdish Singh

In this issue of **EduComm Asia** in the section of **Successful Media And Research Techniques (SMART)**, we present to you some tips to undertake participatory approach in your research works.

Introduction

Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) methodologies are a growing family of tools, which emphasize quick qualitative methods for gathering timely information for programme planning, implementation and evaluation. Used with the participation of the beneficiary populations, these tools serve as useful aids to assist planners assess the relevance of a project or exercise in a field setting.

As against conventional research, the idea of using PRA methodologies is to gather information not for its own sake, but to take steps towards possible solutions and affecting improvements by responsible participation of the people. These methodologies are, therefore, at times, referred to as 'action research' or 'participatory learning and action' too.

Features of PRA

Local Focus

The focus is on the felt needs of the community and local institutions. The PRA methodologies are used to identify issues directly experienced and explicitly acknowledged as problems or needs by the people who are involved in the process.

Quick Research

There is emphasis on gathering quick information in a systematic manner. Timelines and user-friendliness of research and decision-making techniques are more important than precision and

accuracy of the data. Research becomes cost effectiveness and practical.

Action Orientation

The methodologies generally incorporate methods and techniques for translating the knowledge gained into practical decisions and feasible courses of action.

Participatory Process

Since these are participatory by definition, there is emphasis on involvement of local stakeholders and the professional researchers and planners in a joint learning process. The method aims at empowering the participants and enabling them in the process of collective information gathering, discussion and decision-making, while also encouraging and supporting them in undertaking appropriate action.

Redefining the Roles

The professional becomes more as a facilitator and less an expert. Working methods are selected and modified to become appropriate for the community.

Non-random Sampling

Instead of choosing respondents to account for all variation in the population, PRA methodologies aim at limited, non-random, common sense coverage of the respondents in most cases in so far as it can include types of users and non-users of the programme.

PRA Methodologies

Some common PRA techniques are: social mapping, historical mapping, rapid social orientation profile, group brainstorming, ranking exercises, focus group discussion, etc. We discuss each one of them here to elaborate how you can use them.

Social Mapping

It is especially useful for providing an overview of the local situation such as geographical distribution of environmental, demographic, social and economic and developmental

features in the territory. It is also helpful in monitoring and evaluating changes in the community (e.g. adoption of improved practices, distribution of social resources like schools and health units, etc.) and in the use of natural resources.

Steps in Using the Technique

- Start with collective discussion among a group of the community about the subject and the purpose of the mapping exercise.
- Agree on the graphic symbols to be used. Allow the participants to choose their own symbols.
- Ask a participant (or a group of participants who may volunteer themselves) to draw their own map and help them improve upon it. Purchased maps or aerial photographs can also be used.
- Let a participant plot symbols according to the suggestions of the group in relation to the issue under investigation. (For example, asking people to indicate on the village map where the drain or hand pumps or forest areas are).
- Promote participation of all group members by posing individual questions and discussing different opinions and perceptions.
- Once the map is finalized, it can become a starting point to discuss, identify main problems revealed by the map, and ask them about possible solutions within the locally available resources.

This exercise is helpful in providing people a broad overview of the situation, seeing links, patterns and inter-relationships in their territory. Individuals who are non-literate can also participate.

Historical Mapping

In historical mapping a series of mapping exercises are done to portray the demographic and natural resources situation of the community at different moments of its history say 20 years ago, at the present time and what is expected after 20 years or so in future.

Introducing the time dimension in the method helps to provide

evidence of changes that have occurred and expected trends, and thus pave a way to discuss and identify determinants (such as of environmental degradation, population growth, etc.) and consider suitable means of balancing the situation. Adding a time dimension also assists in the identification of spin off effects of an intervention.

Steps in Using the Technique

- A map of the current demographic and environmental situation, as the case may be, is drawn with the participation of the people.
- With the help of the older members of the community, the same exercise is repeated to show the situation as it existed in the past say about 20 years ago.
- The two maps are compared and discussed (using such techniques as brainstorming, group discussion) to collectively identify major changes and their causes.
- Based on the list of changes and causes, a prospective map is drawn by the participants to show the picture 20 years ahead if the current trends continue.
- This can be used to discuss and identify potential means for addressing the problem (such as environmental degradation and population growth)

Rapid Social Orientation Profile

Every community has groups engaged in useful activities such as self-help groups, credit society, co-operative society, and cultural group, radio/TV club etc. These groups can be explored as resources in relation to a particular development project (e.g. health, gender sensitization, income generation, etc.).

Steps in Using the Technique

The community members may be encouraged to collect information of the different social groups. The participating members may first be assisted to prepare a matrix or a schedule containing relevant categories to collect information in a systematic manner. Some useful categories could be as under:

- Name of the group
- Size
- Gender of the members
- Age groups
- Admission rules/conditions and fee, if any
- Activities
- Achievements
- Period of start of the group
- Location
- Link persons in the group

After completing the matrix in the field, a discussion can lead to an exploration of the ways the groups can prove relevant to the project activities.

Group Brainstorming

It is a technique to elicit multiple perceptions of a given issue. The discussion that follows can help find the basis for a consensus among group members and capsuling the common ideas in the form of a list.

Steps in Using the Technique

- The issue to be discussed is introduced by the facilitator in the form of an open-ended question. The facilitator avoids opening statements that are leading and can bias the ideas of the participants.
- The key question is written on the black board or on a flip-chart.
- Participants are asked to provide short answers.
- Stress that all ideas are good ideas and would be welcome. Avoid arguments among the members. Encourage fresh ideas.
- Each participant is allowed to express his/her view. No participant is allowed to dominate.
- Pick the basic point out of the participant statements, and write it down on the black board.
- Review the results with the group. Remove duplicated items. Club groups of similar ideas.
- Highlight differences of opinion and discuss to achieve consensus.
- Keep the brainstorming session short (less than an hour) which does not tire the participants.

It requires understanding of the group dynamics on the part of the facilitator to keep the discussion on track as well as good mediation and summarizing skills.

Ranking Exercises

Ranking exercises are a way to enable people to express their preferences and priorities about a given issue. This technique also generates insights about the criteria through which different individuals make decisions about their preferences.

Steps in Using the Technique

- Make a list of the items to be prioritized. This could come from interviewing, group discussion or brainstorming exercises.
- Define a simple ranking mechanism. This may be based on a pair-wise comparison of items, asking the participants to select one out of the two. Ideally, for this items should not be more than six for manageable number of pairs. Another way is to write each item on a separate card and asking the participants to sort cards in order of preference. Yet another way is to list the items and asking the participants to assign a score to different items.
- Ask the participants to explain the criteria on which they made the choice
- Prepare a matrix on which preferences given by the participants are marked. Work out the frequency or score against each item.
- Carry out a quantitative analysis of the ranking scores and interpret the findings in relation the criteria of choice.
- Use the analysis to promote discussion and consensus among the participants.

Focus Group Discussions

These are semi-structured discussions with a small group of persons sharing common interests and concerns (e.g. women of reproductive age, dry land farmers, beneficiaries of a health centre, etc.). A few specific, open-ended questions are used to start and focus the discussion. A series of such discussions with different groups give a fair idea about the felt needs,

perceptions, attitudes, etc. of the people, and preliminary ideas about possible solutions.

Steps in Using the Technique

- Design a guide for the discussion on a topic, listing relevant questions in their proper sequence.
- Decide on the number of focus groups, each of 6-10 members representing key opposing categories (e.g. men and women, big and small land holders, etc.). Additional group sessions may be organized if the issue is not settled or some groups do not function well.
- Select appropriate facilitators, who may match on gender, age, interest, vernacular language ability, etc.
- Select a second person to take notes, as verbatim as possible, during the discussion. Consider using a tape recorder, if available and the members have no objection.
- Explain the purpose of the session, and pose the topic for discussion.
- Use relevant probing questions to extract ideas.
- Moderate the discussion to keep it focused.
- Encourage each member to

express his/her idea, and dissuade the talkative ones to dominate the discussion.

- Analyze the discussion and summarize the main points, giving key statements of the participants.

This information may be used directly, or as a basis for collecting additional information through surveys, interviews, case studies, etc.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Limitations (SWOL) Analysis

A variation of the much used SWOT analysis, the SWOL analysis is a tool for brainstorming aimed at eliciting group perceptions of the positive factors (strengths), the negative factors (weaknesses), the possible improvements (opportunities), and the constraints (limitations), related to a project or an issue.

Steps in Using the Technique

- A four-column matrix is prepared on the blackboard or a flip chart.
- The four judgment categories are explained to the participants
- The facilitator starts the brainstorming by asking a key

question about the strengths

- The key statements in the responses are written down in the relevant column.
- Similarly, the group also identifies weaknesses, opportunities and limitations.
- In case contradictory statements are forwarded about an issue, the facilitator works toward a solution before it is placed in the matrix.

SWOL is a good technique to stimulate the participants to think about an issue in a holistic manner, and build consensus within the group.

These are a few common PRA methodologies. More can be devised or improvised depending upon the people, the situation and the nature of the project. The idea should be to collect relevant, reliable and quick information with the active participation of the people. In the process, the partners of the research should feel empowered and responsible to take actions towards possible solutions. **ECA**

Reference: Barton, Tom (1997) *Guidelines to monitoring and evaluation; how are we doing?* CARE International in Uganda.

Dr. Jagdish Singh is a Consultant at CEMCA, New Delhi.

News in Brief...

Excellence in Distance Education Awards 2004

COL's Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEA) includes four categories, acknowledging excellence occurring at the overall institutional level, in the development of learning materials, of a lifetime's work as an educator and in student accomplishment.

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

In 2004, COL will present up to

three awards for institutional excellence. The awards recognise

significant institutional achievements in the innovative and effective application of learning technologies and open and distance learning (ODL) methodologies to reach students who might otherwise not have participated in the learning or training experience.

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION MATERIALS

This award recognises excellence in distance education materials produced by publicly funded or not-for-profit organisations of Commonwealth countries. There are two categories under this award:

Category A: materials as part of a distance education

course/programme and **Category B:** multi-media materials supporting non-formal education.

In 2004, COL will present up to three awards in each category. The distance education materials in Category A may support courses or programmes at any level of study across all sectors of education and training, from basic education to tertiary education including continuing professional development. Multi-media materials under Category B should be stand-alone materials for informal/non-formal education. They would not normally be offered for any accreditation.


AWARD RECOGNISING DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

In 2004, COL will present one award for excellence in distance

learning experience. This category was developed to provide a forum for the expression of student experience in learning through distance education. Submissions describing a distance education learning experience, that has been notable for any reason, are invited. In recognition of the winning submission, a travel grant (economy class) and registration fee may be awarded to one student from a Commonwealth country to attend the Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Dunedin, New Zealand, from 4 to 8 July 2004. Eligibility is limited to citizens of Commonwealth countries.

HONORARY FELLOWS OF COL

The designation of Honorary Fellow of COL recognises outstanding individual contributions to distance education in the following categories: leadership/service, published works (including courseware), lectures/presentations, international/national presence and mentorship. Consideration is normally limited to citizens of Commonwealth countries and designations are for life. COL does not seek nominations for this award.

Details regarding submission of nominations for awards in various categories are available at <http://www.col.org/edeal/> 

GATE is part of USDLA




Jones International(TM), Ltd. announced on 12 August 2003 that it is donating the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) to the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA). GATE is a Jones International subsidiary founded in 1995 by Glenn R. Jones to address issues relating to quality

assurance in transnational education. "The USDLA is the source on distance education," said Jones. "We are transferring the ownership of GATE to the USDLA because it is a quality organization that has demonstrated the commitment and has the infrastructure to forward GATE's mission."

When GATE was formed, there were no organizations of its kind addressing the unique issues related to cross-border education, such as standards for its consistency. Annual GATE conferences brought together an international alliance of business, higher education and government leaders to share best practices for furthering the globalization of all education. Today, the GATE accreditation process and principles for transnational education have become measures of quality assurance for institutions of higher education operating across national borders. Quality assurance, networking and multinational organizations worldwide have adopted GATE's mission of promoting access to quality education around the globe.

"The USDLA is very pleased to carry on the work Jones began with the founding of GATE. On a domestic and international basis, USDLA will ensure that the highest standards of excellence for distance learning are available", said Dr. John Flores, Executive Director of the USDLA. In the past GATE has granted accreditation to such educational institutions as Monash University in Melbourne, Australia; Tomsk Polytechnic University in Tomsk, Russia; and Universidad Regiomontana in Monterrey, Mexico. Once GATE has become part of the USDLA, Jones International University(R) (JIU(TM))--the first fully online, accredited university, with students in 70 countries--will be seeking GATE accreditation (JIU received its U.S. accreditation in 1999 from the Higher Learning Commission, a member of the North Central Association).

Source: <http://www.businesswire.com>
See also: <http://www.edugate.org/>
<http://www.usdla.org/> 

ISSN 0972-284X



is published quarterly by Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA).

CEMCA, a centre of **The Commonwealth of Learning (COL)** Vancouver, Canada, is an international agency.

CEMCA's mission is to promote the application of media and technology in education in Asian Commonwealth countries. *For more information,*

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Dr. Usha Vyasulu Reddi

Design & Printed by :

Ritika Advertising,
D-306 (1st Floor), Defence Colony,
New Delhi - 110 024

Printed and Published by

Mr. D. K. Tetri
For and on behalf of CEMCA

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Book Review...



Prasad, V. S. and others (Eds)
(2003) *Best practices in open and distance education*, Hyderabad: Booklinks

Rampelli Satyanarayana

This book is an outcome of the National Conference on 'Best practices in Open and Distance Education' organized by Dr. B. R. Ambedker Open University, Hyderabad, on the occasion of its bicentennial celebrations.

The real beauty of Open and Distance education system lies in the fact that there is enough room for experimentation and innovation based on subjective experiences, generalization and imaginations for better and best practices. Compilation of articles, creating and maintaining idea archives, confessing them with an open mind in the Open University is a positive attempt. The book under review has set its tone in this direction.

The book is a compilation of seven articles presented in the conference along with observations & suggestions made by over ninety participants. The issues covered broadly fall under the following categories- Changes in the technological paradigm and its implications on learning strategies, measures to be taken to counter the challenge of digital divide, conceptualization and benchmarks of best practices, ICT, convergence, awareness about ODL, co-existence of campus, off campus and electronic campus in the future.

Prof. Prasad's paper on Best practices in Open and Distance education problems and concerns,

presented as a presidential address, emphasises upon

the social need to expand educational opportunities, technological developments and strong political will in institutional expansion. By confessing BRAOU travel from first to best university, he also referred to other sister ODL institutional wisdom, such as IGNOU and state Open Universities. He says, "The situation is competitive and in knowledge society only a learning organization can survive" (p. 3).

C. Subba Rao in his paper presented as inaugural address -- Towards Integration of Systems of Learning for Excellence in Higher Education, focuses on Andhra Pradesh Consortium of Distance Education (APCODE) and the SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) report. He also stresses on sharing of resources by networking, the need for a dialogue forum on what open universities are doing to tell the people around.

The paper on 'Managing paradigm shift: parameters and benchmarks for best practices in Open and Distance Education' by Prof. Ram. G. Takwale has reviewed broad areas of higher education in India, its historical process along with its classification. The focus of attention in his paper is on ICT as a driving force, curriculum, delivery, transformation and transitional stage from industry to industrial knowledge society and the emergence of convergence as a key process of 21st century E-education.

The paper on 'Resources for best practises' by Usha Vyasulu Reddy starts with a clarification of the basic accepted terminology in the Open and Distance Education. She compares and differentiates between face-to-face and open and distance education on its operational strategies. She initiates a debate by making an assumption that 'Open and Distance learning is only as strong as weakest link' (p. 39). Discovering the weakest link is the central point of her paper, which she tries to identify by posing a number of issues like

administrative and pedagogical issues and the role of leadership in its sustenance process by quoting Paul Ross. She also raises several macro and micro issues. The chief among the macro front are institutional vision and policy system as a resource, role of orientation, refresher and brainstorming. On the micro level issues like regulation, monitoring, accreditation, quality assurance are dealt with prominently.

The paper on 'Quality assurance and Best Practices' by Lata Pillai is comprehensive in its overall coverage. She says, "Best Practices are dynamic and are a result of a continuous process of experimentation, innovation and adoption." It is a good coverage about indicators of assessment, promotion of activities, database, research, feedback, software, accreditation, accountability and benchmarking issues in Open and Distance Education.

The paper on 'Adoption and Adaptation of best practices in Open and Distance Education: An Assessment' by M. M. Ansarari raises issues of policies, adoption, adaptation and their constraints in the implementation level. He has also dealt with course design, development, training, HRD, media, mythological issues and relevant issues related to implementation strategies. His overall ideas revolve around quality and accreditation in the framework of DEC and NAAC.

The paper on 'Promotion of Best Practices in Open and Distance Learning through participation in the NAAC accreditation' by Rajashekeran Pillai, touches upon important issues like quality maintenance and role of apex bodies like DEC and NAAC and their basis of assessment and accreditation based on local environment, vision and mission statement of an educational institution. Role of curriculum, its inter-disciplinary innovations, its implementation or delivery strategies, research, and communication strategies were adequately focused and skills for learning strategies at distance were adequately covered.

Prof. Dhanrajan in the valedictory address reviewed global experiences

with ICT. He feels that in practice, 'Education is too important a service to be left in the hands of those who have little or no concern for either its values and its quality' (p. 110). He opined that the Indian situation is not different from many other developing and developed countries. In the second part, he emphasizes on faculty and institutional commitments; infra-structural facilities in pedagogical,

administrative, technological; web skills and user-friendly devices in education based on the imaginative and client responsive curriculum. Finally he concludes by asserting that technological innovations continuously improve quality of services.

To the reviewer, 'best practice' in Indian context is 'Minimising individual glorification and maximising institutional

development' by which both individual and institution can grow meaningfully. To conclude, bringing out the papers presented at the National Conference in the form of a book is really a best practice to share ideas and issues in the field of Open and Distance Education. **ECA**

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Murphy, D.; Shin, N. and Zhang, W (Eds) (2002) *Advancing Online Learning in Asia, Hong Kong*: OUHK Press ISBN 962-7707-31-7

Sanjaya Mishra

The only educational technology innovation that has so many names is Web-based Instruction, called as online learning, e-learning, virtual education, etc. Notwithstanding their differences in nomenclature, they all probably mean the same using the World Wide Web (WWW) to reach more number of students. No other innovation in education has affected both the developed and developing world, the way online learning has. However, the use of online learning in both the context is paradoxically opposite. In the western developed societies, online learning is used to attract more students to generate revenue and allow flexibility of any time any where learning. In the developing countries of Asia, online learning is seen as a panacea for the growing demands for higher, further and technical education by large number of the population. Though the motives are different, online learning is making rapid advances in all parts of the world including Asia. However, as the editors of the book have pointed out

there is little information available on research on online learning in Asian region, and this book is an attempt to bridge this gap in literature.

Consisting of 16 papers drawn from the papers presented at the CRIDALA 2002 on "WWW.Research.ODL", the book showcases the various research attempts and their results. The first three chapters are broad in scope and provide an overview of online learning from many perspectives. Chapter 1 provides an overview of online education in 11 open universities in Asia. Though, it depicts a canvas of online learning in Asia, some of the data presented are questionable and are not valid, as the researchers used a questionnaire to gather data rather than to access the actual courses offered online. Chapter 2 discusses the notion of building communities in online learning and social presence in online learning, while chapter 3 provides an overview of online learning from the students' perspective.

Chapter 4-9 examine student experiences, attitudes and perceptions on online learning in various contexts and situations. Chapter 4 discusses the experiences of Hong Kong students studying overseas courses. Chapter 5 reports students' participation in computer mediated communication. In Chapter 6, Anuradhar Deshmukh reports the perceptions of the students of Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) on teaching and learning online. Similar issues are discussed in the next chapter in the context of Universiti Tun Abdul Razak in Malaysia. Students' attitude and students' perceptions towards online

learning form the topic of discussion in chapter 8 and 9 respectively.

Rest of the chapters of the book discusses many different issues not directly related to each other. Chapter 10 by Namin Shin discusses online pedagogy, and reports on the voices of students and teachers. Chapter 11 on cyber culture and the development of online education reports on the Chinese situation in this context. Chapter 12 deals with the learning needs of people with disabilities and online education. Chapter 13 reports a case study on interactive web-based laboratory. Chapter 14 critically looks at the usage of online activities (E-tivities). Chapter 15 provides a comparison of ISDN and the Internet through two different application projects. In the last chapter, as case has been argued for development of databases on and for ODL research. Though, it may look out of place for many in a book on online education, the inclusion of this chapter is justified because of the importance and significant contribution it makes in organizing our ideas about data management through eh Web.

Through the collection of these 16 papers, the editors have put together some innovative works done in the Asian context. These papers show that the issues pertaining to online learning are similar in developed and developing countries. However, it is just the beginning, and future editions of this book will tell us the "Advancement of Online Learning in Asia" in true sense. **ECA**

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Software Review...

Macromedia Flash MX as authoring tool

Asha Pandey

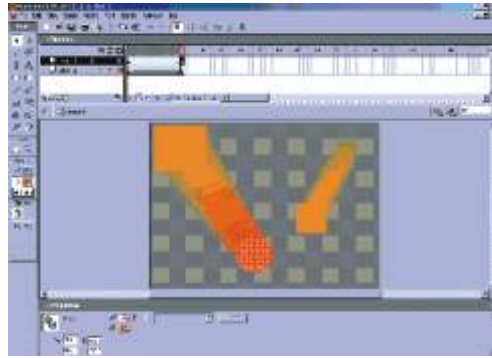
The field of multimedia authoring and developing has never been more challenging regardless of what complexity you are seeking in the development process. The numerous available tool-options give you the power to transform any text or online content into a living interactive experience. Creation of Computer-based training (CBT) stresses wizards, templates, and other tools designed to make it easier for non programmers to generate applications. Other features include the ability to interface with a database either proprietary or via ODBC for tracking student performance, and special tools designed for creating exercises.

Some of the instructional multimedia authoring tools which remain leaders in the competitive authoring systems market are Macromedia Authorware, Macromedia Director, ToolBook II Instructor and Macromedia Flash.

Macromedia Flash MX Flash MX is extremely versatile as an authoring tool, which means you're not stuck with the tool designer's limited ideas of what you should be designing and developing.

The new Macromedia Flash Communication Server MX enables educators and students to develop their own communication environment. They can quickly build functions such as one- or two-way video, audio, chat, and shared

content development using prebuilt Macromedia Flash components.



System requirements for Flash authoring

- **For Microsoft® Windows:** An Intel Pentium 200 MHz or equivalent processor running Windows 98 SE, Windows ME, Windows NT 4.0, Windows 2000, or Windows XP; 64 MB of RAM (128 MB recommended); 85 MB of available disk space; a 16-bit color monitor capable of 1024 x 768 resolution; and a CD-ROM drive.
- **For the Macintosh:** A Power Macintosh running Mac OS 9.1 (or later) or Mac OS X version 10.1 (or later); 64 MB RAM free application memory (128 MB recommended), plus 85 MB of available disk space; a color monitor capable of displaying 16-bit (thousands of colors) at 1024 x 768 resolution; and a CD-ROM drive.

Unique strengths for teacher-developers

- Includes built-in learning interactions

- Customized interface to meet your needs
- Professional-quality toolsets, pre-built templates, and components

Macromedia Flash MX includes six built-in learning interactions, including quiz templates and stand-alone interactions, to simplify and accelerate the development of online learning content. An interaction is a part of a movie in which the user interacts with the movie to provide a response. This interaction may be part of a quiz or other instructional piece. You can customize the interface to meet your needs. Because you are using Macromedia Flash, you can create high-quality interfaces that load quickly and look the same on different platforms. The interface is more intuitive, and makes seeing the big picture while authoring easier (big plus).

Flash MX comes with professional-quality toolsets, pre-built templates, and components, making it easy to create class projects, online learning, campus portals, and more.



Top 6 new features in Flash MX that make it a great learning content authoring tool:

1. **Video Support:** Rich content and applications authored with Macromedia Flash MX can now include interactive streaming video clips. QuickTime and RealVideo can now be imported within Macromedia Flash MX and enhanced with interactivity.

2. *Familiar User Interface with New Property Inspector and Answers Panel:* User interface enhancements include collapsible panels and a new context-sensitive Property inspector that highlights what tools and objects can be used in relation to a selected element. The user interface also contains a new Answers panel that connects the web to the development tool and provides useful information to designers and developers within the user interface.

3. *Dynamic Loading of Images and Sound:* Macromedia Flash Player 6 now dynamically loads external JPEG and MP3 media files during runtime, which results in smaller file sizes and the developer's easy modification of the content without having to re-author it.

4. *Pre-built Components and Improved ActionScript Capabilities:* Take advantage of Internet application development trends by using templates and pre-built components to rapidly prototype application interfaces in Macromedia Flash MX. New tools include a powerful ActionScript editor and an integrated debugger that allows the setting of breakpoints and single-step code execution, for easy troubleshooting of scripting errors.

5. *Accessibility:* Descriptive text can be added more easily to Macromedia Flash MX content to ensure that people with disabilities can effectively interact with the content.

6. *Multilingual Support:* Vertical Text and support for Unicode in Macromedia Flash MX enables developers to rapidly build multilingual content and applications. Macromedia Flash MX will ship in 11 languages, including three new languages: Korean, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese.


Macromedia Flash MX learning interactions help you create interactive online instructional courses that run in Flash. The learning interactions that ship with Macromedia Flash MX include:

True/False: Creates an interaction in which the user responds to a true/false question.

- **Multiple Choice:** Creates an interaction in which the user responds to a multiple-choice question.
- **Fill in the Blank:** Accepts a response that the user types and checks it against matching phrases.
- **Drag and Drop:** Sets up an interaction in which the user responds to a question by dragging one or more onscreen objects to a target.
- **Hot Spot:** Creates an interaction in which the user responds by clicking a region (or regions) on the screen.
- **Hot Object:** Sets up an interaction in which the user responds correctly by clicking an object (or objects) on the screen.

There is no 'one ultimate solution'

Learning applications are of diverse natures, ranging from simple text-and-graphics tutorials to sophisticated diverse media enabled simulations. Hence, no one product meets this broad range of project requirements equally well.

Therefore, it would be a good idea for learning developers to use a combination of products to create their courseware. 

Asha Pandey is Chairperson of E I Design Pvt. Ltd (www.eidesign.net), Bangalore. She can be reached at apandey@bgl.vsnl.net.in

Educational Media Database

As an ongoing project CEMCA has been developing and maintaining a database of educational audio and video programmes produced in the region. The database currently has more than 6000 records. The purpose of the database is to act as a reference point for sharing of information and resources. Educational institutions in the region are requested to continuously send us list of audio and video programmes produced by them for updating the database. By submitting information for inclusion in the database you are actually making it available to a wider community of users through our online website and the offline CD ROM. Now, it has also been decided to supply the database and its regular updates to participating institutions. Therefore please share information about your audio and video programmes and co-operate in updating this database. For further details contact: *Director, CEMCA.*

Forthcoming Events...

3rd Pan Commonwealth Forum, 4th-8th July, 2004



Building Learning Communities for Our Millennium: Reaching Wider Audiences through Innovative Approaches.

The Third Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is to be held from 4 July to 8 July 2004 in Dunedin, New Zealand. It will address the following themes:

Education: The development and delivery of technology mediated learning and teaching using open and distance learning strategies in the sectors of pre-school, primary, secondary, post-secondary, adult and tertiary education.

Health: the use of open and distance learning and technology mediated strategies for the provision of training in the health, agriculture and allied professions.

Local Government: the use of open and distance and technology mediated learning strategies to enhance practical knowledge and skills for the development of local government and public infrastructure.

Participants with an interest in any of these themes are invited to attend. People who wish to submit articles for academic purposes may submit them to the Conference Secretary, Pam Wyse, pam.wyse@aut.ac.nz or at Private Bag 92006, Auckland Mail Centre, Auckland 1020, New Zealand. <http://www.col.org/pcf3/>

NAWeb 2003



The NAWeb 2003 - The Web-Based Learning Conference to be held from October 18-21, 2003 at New Brunswick, Canada will focus on innovative and practical uses of the World Wide Web in teaching and learning, extending the reach of existing campuses and creating "virtual" campuses of a new and

unique nature. For more information, contact: Rick

Hall, Email: hall@unb.ca Website: <http://naweb.unb.ca/>

E-Learn 2003



Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education Conference: "E-Learn 2003: World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education" from November 7, 2003 to November 11, 2003 at Phoenix, AZ For more information, contact: Jennifer Gwaltney, Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education, P.O. Box 3728, Norfolk, VA 23514, Email: conf@aace.org Website: <http://www.aace.org/conf/elearn>

AAOU 2003



17th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities on "Networking and Partnership for Strengthening Collaboration in Open and Distance Education" to be held from 12-14 November 2003 at Siam City Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand. For more information, contact: Assoc. Prof. Lapa Chintanaseri, Conference Director, Foreign Relations Unit, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Bangpood, Pakkred, Nonthaburi 11120, Thailand, E-mail: aaou2003@stou.ac.th Website: www.stou.ac.th/Aaou2003/index.htm

m-ICTE 2003



2nd International Conference on "Multimedia and Information & Communication Technologies in Education" to be held at Badajoz (Spain) from 3-6 December 2003. For details visit: <http://www.formatex.org/micte2003/committees.htm>

ICOOL



International Conference on Open and Online Learning on "Community Development and Networking for Capacity Building" to be organized by University of Mauritius from 7-13 December 2003. For further details visit: <http://vcampus.uom.ac.mu/icool2003/user/index.php>

Distance Education Clearinghouse: Conference Database



The Conference Database of the Distance Education Clearinghouse identifies worldwide conferences, seminars, workshops, and other events of interest to distance education and related fields. Events may be on site or online, but in all cases, the topic must always relate to distance education. You can find conferences by title, location, or date. Call for Papers information is also available in the Conference Database. Additionally, you are invited to submit a conference or call for consideration for this database. Visit the websiteL <http://www.uwex.edu/disted/conf/>



Dear readers,

EduComm Asia is your newsletter of useful ideas, views and information. From one issue to the next, we aim strengthen the newsletter. The best way to do so is by keeping content diverse. You can help to do so by becoming a contributor. Write to us about educational media news and other events that you would like to see in the newsletter. All contributions shall be duly acknowledged and appreciated.

-Editors