COL Board of Governors' Meeting

Jennifer Glennie reports on the Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) Board meeting in Vancouver in May 2006

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Resources for New Ways of Learning: A Manual for Developers of Learning Resources

During 2005 and 2006, as part of the Khanyisa Project SAIDE conducted a series of workshops to build the capacity of a group of educators from Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in Limpopo in course design and learning resource development. From the outset we envisaged the need for a manual to support people who participated in the workshops as well as their colleagues. This manual incorporates many of the support materials we developed for the workshops and other information that may be useful to anyone involved in the acquisition and development of learning resources. Christine Randell reports.

News in Brief

SAIDE Current Awareness Service

COL Board of Governors' Meeting

Jennifer Glennie reports on the Commonwealth of Learning's(COL) Board meeting in Vancouver in May 2006

In 2005, South Africa became one of the major donors to COL along with Canada, the UK, India, and New Zealand. I was requested by Minister Pandor to take up South Africa's place on COL's Board of Governors. The Board includes donor representatives, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth and appointees to represent the four regions of the Commonwealth. It meets annually in Vancouver and otherwise transacts through teleconference and email.

The key items on this year's agenda were the evaluation of COL, conducted by Patrick Spaven, and the refinement of the Three Year Strategic Plan: 2006 to 2009. An earlier draft of the plan, entitled *Learning for Development,* was made available on the COL website and attracted over 50 responses. The plan divides the international development agenda into three broad sectors: education, learning for livelihoods and human environment. Within each of these sectors, COL aims for one or more of three outcomes: policies, systems, and models and materials. Knowledge management technology will continue as a cross-cutting activity. One of the major activities is the development of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, a collaborative network requested by the Ministers of Education that is gathering momentum.

The plan will form the basis of intensive discussions with Commonwealth Education Ministers before their 16th triennial Conference in Cape Town in December. These discussions will identify the focus of activity for each country within this overall plan. The plan represents a sophisticated attempt to balance the dual imperatives of being responsive to the needs of Commonwealth countries while maintaining some focus in relation to the size of the organization and its budget. A final version of the plan will be available shortly.

COL is being particularly careful in maintaining its communication links with each of the Commonwealth members through a government representative. South Africa's is Ms Trudi Van Wyk at the Department of Education.

I was honoured to be appointed to the Executive Committee of COL and to Chair the Audit Committee.

COL Board of Governors' Meeting 2006

Quality Assurance and eLearning: A CHE/SAIDE Project 2005/2006

The aim of this project was to achieve a better understanding of how eLearning is evolving in South African higher education institutions and to ensure that emerging eLearning practices are taken into account in the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance processes – programme accreditation, institutional audit, and quality promotion. Tessa Welch reports:

Establishing an informed base for the project
Three steps were necessary to establish the project on a firm footing:

* Agreement on terminology to be used, and fundamental classification of types of eLearning.

One of the problems in the eLearning environment is the plethora of terms used and the lack of agreement on preferred terms. The term eLearning has mainly been used in the project because this is the preferred term internationally, and the definitions of eLearning and selected related terms were taken from the South African White Paper on e-Education (2004):

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) represent the convergence of information technology and communication technology. ICTs are the combination of networks, hardware and software as well as the means of communication, collaboration and engagement that enable the processing, management and exchange of data, information and knowledge.

eLearning is flexible learning using ICT resources, tools and applications, focusing on
- accessing information,
- interaction among teachers, learners, and the online environment,
- collaborative learning, and
- production of materials, resources and learning experiences.

eLearning may involve the use of Internet, CD-ROM, software, other media and telecommunications.

Online learning refers more specifically to the use of the Internet and associated web-based applications as the delivery medium for the learning experience.

In addition, however, the following distinctions between different types of online learning/eLearning were adopted from the Commonwealth Department of Education and Science, namely:

* web-supplemented
* web-dependent, and
* fully online courses.

It was also important to establish the existing regulatory framework for higher education in South Africa. If further specific measures were to be considered for eLearning, the framework for these would need to be understood.

Through interviews with key Department of Education staff and Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee personnel on eLearning issues as well as a review of relevant regulations, a description of the current regulatory framework in South African higher education was prepared. This document demonstrated that further regulation specifically for eLearning would be adding to an already extensive regulatory framework and would have to be strongly justified.

The third important piece of background work was to investigate the literature on eLearning and on approaches to the regulation of eLearning internationally.

Firstly, we conducted a literature review on the types of learning enabled by online environments. The methods employed were: an extensive search of the World Wide Web; a

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search of the SAIDE resource centre; and a systematic follow-up of key research texts related to learning in hypertext modality. The literature review is a broad scan of research that has been conducted locally and internationally on instructional technologies in higher education, particularly information and communication technologies. It presents a brief analysis of various research studies and scholarly publications examined, focusing on the main trends identified in that research and identifying some gaps in the body of literature consulted.

Secondly, we prepared a document entitled: *Comparing Regulatory Frameworks in the Terrain of eLearning Internationally: What are the Important Issues?* We found that the most useful examples were the following:

eLearning Framework: Australia, UK, Canada ; National Tertiary eLearning Framework: New Zealand ; United States eLearning Framework : USA ; The European Communities eLearning Action Plan: the European Union ; DETC Policy on Electronically Delivered Learning: USA ; Sun Microsystems, Inc ELearning Framework: UK.

From the comparative analysis we found agreement on the following issues that could be the subject of regulation:
A. Pedagogy
B. Educational design
C. Student support
D. Evaluation
E. Staffing
F. Institutional management
G. Technology
E. Cross-border delivery of eLearning

The question remained open, however, as to whether further regulation would be helpful in the South African higher education context.

Overview of current practice in eLearning in South Africa
The next set of tasks in the process was to obtain an understanding of current eLearning practice in South Africa – beyond the general concerns already mentioned above.

SAIDE had previously been involved in an investigation into distance higher education commissioned by the CHE in 2003/2004 and was aware that much of the interest in eLearning had emerged from that process. Through examination of the stakeholders' submissions to the CHE Task Team in the course of that investigation, the position of the various institutions on the use of ICTs in teaching and learning was identified. In addition, the findings of a parallel study *Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and South African Higher Education: Mapping the Landscape* was consulted, particularly with regard to national policies. The information gained from these two pieces of existing research was corroborated/supplemented by information gathered in 2005 through a questionnaire administered to higher education institutions to elicit information on the existence of eLearning policies and research within the institutions.

Following on from this, we developed four short case studies of eLearning practices in South African higher education. The aim was to gain insights into issues that have a bearing on the question of *quality* in eLearning. We selected courses or programmes at four institutions – the universities of South Africa, the North West, Johannesburg and the Free State.

A further product from this process was a document with six pen sketches of practice in South African higher education institutions prepared using not only the data gathered from the four case studies but also data from the examination of stakeholder submissions. The purpose of the pen sketches is to provide a quick picture of six different institutional approaches to the use of ICTs for teaching and learning. Simply reading definitions of practice is not always illuminating: sometimes examples of practice are needed as well.

A regulatory framework for eLearning in South Africa?
In order to review the work thus far and seek advice from eLearning practitioners, a workshop was held on 13 and 14 February 2006. The stated purpose of the workshop was:

- To identify for the HEQC's consideration, a set of eLearning quality issues requiring regulation or inclusion in self-evaluation questions for higher education institutions, and to recommend to the HEQC the form that the regulation and/or guidelines should take.

The workshop participants were strongly opposed to specific regulation of eLearning. The conclusions drawn at, and after the workshop, were that issues of quality in eLearning can be dealt with in the context of existing regulatory principles, criteria and standards, and that in relation to HEQC audit and programme accreditation a more useful approach would be to prepare notes for the interpretation of the existing HEQC criteria rather than to suggest additions/revisions to the criteria for eLearning or create any further regulatory documents.

After comment from HEQC staff and workshop participants, the following two documents were produced:

- Notes for the interpretation of the HEQC *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* for the use of ICTs for teaching and learning.
- Notes for the interpretation of the HEQC *Criteria for Institutional Audit* for the use of ICTs for teaching and learning.

In addition at the workshop, participants commented on the integration of eLearning issues into the draft *Good Practice Guide for Distance Education* prepared for another HEQC project, and to be published as one in the series of HEQC Good Practice Guides. However, workshop participants recommended that consideration be given to the publication of a set of HEQC resources on eLearning specifically (rather than only as related to distance education) to assist with institutional capacity building around ICT issues.

Finally, workshop participants stated strongly that the use of ICTs in higher education has to be dealt with systemically. Discussion pointed out that three different regulatory contexts impact on the educational use of technology – the educational sector itself which is primarily concerned with teaching and learning, the national ICT infrastructure with associated policy/regulations, and societal issues such as the 'commodification of knowledge' and the impact of the so-called 'information society'. It was therefore recommended that:

- The CHE consider convening a task team of people with expertise in the three related systems to look at how the regulatory frameworks articulate, and how together they can serve the goal of improved and more equitable higher education to provide equitable access to the whole sector.

Students and eLearning
The final dimension to be covered by the project was that of student literacy.

If there is a need for institutional capacity building on the issue of eLearning, there is also a need for students to understand various of the ways in which ICTs are used for teaching and learning, and issues to be mindful of in the selection of courses and institutions for eLearning.

Hence the final part of this project was to prepare copy for a simple guide to eLearning, with some tips about how to choose a quality programme.

For documents that emerged from the project, please contact Barbara Morrow at the CHE.

Distance Education Policy-making : Part Two

SAIDE recently concluded the Southern African Regional Learning Centre (SARDEC) on-line course in Distance Education Policy-making. During this time, SARDEC has been formally renames as the SADC Distance Education Centre. Tony Mays, the course leader reflects on lessons learned from the course.

By the end of the SARDEC on-line course, participants had developed draft country policies for further discussion in Botswana, Lesotho and Zambia. Unfortunately, other participants fell by the wayside as they returned to their countries after our January workshop and the immediate demands of work quickly took priority over the development of draft policy documents for discussion. Many participants returned to their own institutions to carry out field work which took them away from their offices, their homes and their computers, and hence away from the online discussion that followed the workshop.

Nonetheless, sufficient progress was made to suggest that the following series of activities would be useful for future participants on such a course:

1. developing a country case study on educational needs and provision, and identifying the possible contribution of distance education;
2. undertaking an analysis of existing policy and stakeholders to develop both a policy framework and a suitably representative process for policy development;
3. developing a draft distance education policy applicable to the country that addresses the potential identified in 1) and which could be used as a source document for the process envisaged in 2).

It was interesting to discover that that there seem to be very few published policy documents at country level available on the Internet - although there are many examples at institutional level.

For two useful examples at a provincial level, it was worth taking a look at the following websites:

- www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/distance_ed.html (a good example to show the need for linkage with existing policy).
- www.oregon.org/OUSpolicydraft.pdf (a good example of what participants were working towards in the course).

Another useful website to visit was:
www.iucea.org/publications.php?/publications_id=37 (which contains a useful background paper on Uganda of the sort that would need to be compiled as a precursor to developing a DE policy).

If the decision is made to go the route of developing a stand-alone policy for distance education, then it was suggested that a draft policy document should, at least, cover the following issues:

- A preamble that explains the need for such a policy and how it relates to existing policy;
- Definitions of key terms like distance education, open learning, eLearning, for example;
- Some kind of statement about the equivalence of qualifications gained through different modes provided that the programmes and providers have been duly accredited;
- An outline of the accreditation process for providers and programmes;
- Details of the pre-requisites for accreditation especially with regard to materials and learner support;
- Some indication about the national funding of distance education programmes;
- Some insight into governance issues.

On the whole, the course was interesting and set a solid foundation on which the necessary additional, in-country consultation, research and policy development can be built.

The ECD Fundamentals Project

SAIDE, in collaboration with partners Woz'obona and COUNT, has recently published two volumes of training courses for ECD practitioners, in Communications and Mathematics fundamentals respectively. The courses are designed to meet Level One National Qualifications Framework (NQF) requirements. They are published as open source materials, downloadable from the Internet, and may be used freely by non-profit organizations and public education institutions in courses that they offer. Sheila Drew and Ian Moll elaborate on the project.

In developing the materials, SAIDE believes that it has responded to a need in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector, for contextualized training materials that ECD caregivers will be able to relate to. At the same time, the project has raised questions about just what it is that should be required in terms of knowledge and skills for ECD caregivers. In the course of this project SAIDE has also learnt more about open source publishing, using the Creative Commons mechanism. This brief article reflects on these various issues.

The need in ECD

Under the NQF, a qualification in ECD requires that the learner has a certain number of credits in core learning, a certain number of elective or specialist credits and a set number of credits in fundamental learning in mathematical literacy and communications. In South Africa today there are upwards of 80 ECD non-government training providers that have received accreditation from the Education Training and Development Practice sectoral authority (ETDP-SETA). This accreditation, however, tends to be provided only for training in core and elective credits.

Many of the people (mostly women) that these NGOs train have not completed their formal schooling, which means they do not have sufficient credits for their fundamental learning in order to get a full qualification in ECD. Most ECD NGOs are not in a position to provide training in these fundamentals which has resulted in many ECD Practitioners experiencing difficulty in accessing learning in this area. Courses that do exist tend to be both expensive and contextually inappropriate. The main purpose of this project is to provide ECD training agencies the opportunity to offer quality fundamentals for ECD practitioners, as cheaply as possible.

Over the past nine months, the Zenex Foundation has made it possible for SAIDE, Woz'obona and COUNT to work in partnership to produce training materials in Fundamentals for Communications and Mathematical Literacy at NQF Level One. The materials are aimed specifically at ECD practitioners, giving them a contextualised learning experience. Each unit provides opportunities for learners to reflect on their own learning, consider how they will apply what they have learned in their own daily work managing ECD centres, and in their teaching of young children.

In Phase Two of the project, the materials are being piloted in a national 'roadshow' by training trainers from selected ECD organizations and institutions in their use. Briefing sessions have been held in Gauteng, Limpopo and Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape. The briefing sessions aim to explain the purpose of the materials, discuss agencies' participation in the project, and the process and timeframes of the training. All non-profit organisations that attended the briefing session have received free printed copies of the learner's materials.

The first round of training of trainers is being conducted by qualified trainers from Woz'obona and COUNT. Trainees participate in two week-long sessions of Communications training and two week-long sessions of Mathematics training, spread over 4 months. This allows for trainees to engage in self-study in-between the face-to-face sessions, with ongoing support from COUNT and Woz'obona. In turn, these trainers should then be able to provide fundamentals training to their own learner-practitioners.

What should ECD practitioners know and be able to do?

The 'level' of these materials is relatively high. The mathematics content is essentially equivalent to the new Mathematical Literacy curriculum of the FET phase in schools; the Communications content is of a similar standard. Many people may look at the materials – particularly the mathematics – and say something such as:

> "But this is ridiculous. Not even teachers are required to get this level of maths, unless they are qualified maths or science teachers. Why should poor ECD caregivers be required to jump through these hoops?"

Indeed many teachers in our classrooms have not demonstrated competence in mathematics equivalent to matric. But perhaps this argument is short-sighted. The purpose of introducing Mathematical Literacy in FET as a compulsory subject is to help to upgrade the mathematical skills of the whole population over time, recognising that such skills are necessary to any human activity in the modern economy. Surely this is as applicable to ECD caregivers as for any other job? The debate rages – should the whole qualification route for ECD caregivers be just the same as the whole qualification route for any other sector?

Whatever the outcomes of these debates in the longer term, the current project has faced difficult challenges in the context of the current qualifications environment. Mainly, these have arisen out of the level of learning required by SAQA for a whole qualification for ECD practitioners, in terms of the NQF. For a Level One ECD qualification, learners are expected to do Fundamentals at Level One. Many of the ECD practitioners currently being trained by NGOs are likely to be placed at ABET Levels 2 and 3 – some perhaps, even lower – making learning at NQF Level One difficult, especially in Mathematics. Indeed many of the ECD trainers themselves would be placed only at NQF Level One.

A further related challenge has been the length of the materials and, consequently, the length of training time required. We set out planning to produce two manuals of 96 pages each. We ended up with one 96 page manual for Communications, and *four* 96 page manuals for Mathematics, in order to be able to cover the required Unit Standards! We believe the training time required is far longer than is normally required.

Open Source Publication
It was decided early on in the project that the materials needed to be distributed as widely as possible in order to try and overcome some of the problems of access to Fundamentals learning that have been experienced by ECD practitioners. In order to do this we decided to follow the open source route. The materials have been put onto the Department of Education website Thutong where they can be viewed and freely downloaded.

As open source materials they are subject to a Creative Commons Licence. This allows anyone accessing the materials to copy, distribute and display the work under certain conditions:

- By *attribution*. You must give the original authors credit, and acknowledge the role of the Zenex Education Foundation in sponsoring the work, in the terms that appear in the materials.
- For *non-commercial use*. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- Profit-making entities who charge a fee for access to the work, or for training programmes that make use of the work, are not permitted to copy, distribute and display the work. They may, however, purchase copies of the work from SAIDE to use as textbooks in courses they offer.
- However, use for educational purposes by non-profit organizations or public educational institutions is permitted.
- In the case of non-profit ECD organizations, the work may be used and reproduced freely in training programmes that generate income for the exclusive use of the organisation.
- *No derivative works*. You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.
- For any *reuse or distribution*.You must make clear to others the license terms of this work.

In formulating these conditions, particularly those under the second bullet above, SAIDE grappled seriously with the intentions of open source publishing. The spirit of open source publishing seems to be to make writing and other information as widely available as possible, to ensure access to knowledge is not undermined by prohibitive profit-making and intellectual property restrictions. At the same time, it seeks to give fair recognition to authors for their contributions, and to ensure that what they produce is not distorted in any way. What we have tried to do here is to make resources available to non-profit organisations which can help ensure that the spirit of the work they do is not undermined by having to pay unnecessarily large amounts of money for quality learning materials to profit-making enterprises.

Resources for New Ways of Learning: A Manual for Developers of Learning Resources

During 2005 and 2006, as part of the Khanyisa Project SAIDE conducted a series of workshops to build the capacity of a group of educators from Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in Limpopo in course design and learning resource development. From the outset we envisaged the need for a manual to support people who participated in the workshops as well as their colleagues. This manual incorporates many of the support materials we developed for the workshops and other information that may be useful to anyone involved in the acquisition and development of learning resources. Christine Randell reports.

The title of the manual sums up the challenge facing educators in FET colleges and other education and training settings. In the fast moving world of technology which is fuelling the growth of information, educators and students alike have to engage with a variety of resources in order to keep up-to-date with current thinking and practice. Gone are the days when a simple textbook was prescribed that 'covered' the course. The ability to select and where feasible to compile suitable learning resources for a particular course and programme is now becoming a necessary part of the educator's competency profile.

Focus in the manual
There are many guides and manuals available on the design of learning resources. So what does this manual add to what already exists? Its main strength is probably that it was compiled in response to the needs of a group of educators who are faced with the challenge of opening education for their students in FET colleges in a largely rural area of South Africa . The focus throughout is pragmatic and examples are included that highlight various aspects of the design process.

People often want to start acquiring or developing learning resources before they have sufficiently considered how they intend to use them in a particular programme and what the implications are for educators and students alike. The first few sections of the manual deal with preparatory analysis that enables educators to make informed decisions about the type of resource to acquire and what method to use – whether to adapt an existing learning resource or to create from scratch.

The planning and development of learning resources are presented as elements of an interrelated, dynamic and iterative process in which assessment is centrally placed.

Assessment requirements are a good starting point when designing learning resources as they provide a benchmark of the level of competence that learners are expected to achieve.

Features in the manual
The manual has been arranged as a practical easy-to-follow guide which has the following distinctive components:

- Each of the seven topics starts with a **short reflection** on some of the main challenges of that phase in the design process.
- Readers are invited to reflect on their own practice and integrate what they are learning as they progress through the manual. This **Reflect and Act** section can be regarded as a learning journal which is threaded through the manual.
- In some topics **additional information** is included.
- The **Toolkit** comprises PowerPoint presentation slides, templates, tables, and examples that can be adapted for specific contexts and requirements.

Who the manual is for
This versatile resource can be used in different ways. Here are some suggestions:

- Educators in FET colleges have to respond to requests from business and industry to develop suitable learning resources for all kinds of short skills programmes. For them the manual is a self-help guide.

- Although the examples included are from programmes in FET colleges, facilitators in other education and training settings can derive benefit from the guidance provided.
- It gives a helpful introduction to the design process and can be used as part of a staff development programme to orient educators to this important aspect of teaching and learning.
- A trainer can use sections of the manual and resources from the Toolkit during workshops and training interventions.
- It can be helpful for managers of learning programmes to get an overview of what is involved in the design and development of learning resources.

The manual is still in draft version. It will be finalised after field testing with a group of FET educators in Limpopo during a workshop at the end of July 2006.

News in Brief

SAIDE Current Awareness Service

The SAIDE Resource Centre would like to alert readers of our newsletter to the daily email current awareness service we provide listing education articles that appear in The Sowetan, The Star, Business Day, Mail and Guardian, Financial Mail, Sunday Times and Sunday Independent. In addition we attach articles that appear in online news services such as All Africa.Com and IOL (Independent Online) news feeds. Our focus is on South African education and skills development and extends to southern Africa when subjects such as distance education and the use of technology in education are covered. The service was initially started as an in-house exercise, however, we have opened it up to external subscribers.

Recent feedback from a chief education specialist at the Department of Education is:

> "Thanx for this great service. Having these current articles available certainly helps me to stay abreast of certain developments (and it definitely helps when writing speeches…)"

Should you be interested in this free SAIDE service, please send an email to Jenny Louw.