



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

PERSPECTIVES ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

Teacher Education through Open and Distance Learning

Patrick Alan Danaher and Abdurrahman Umar, Editors

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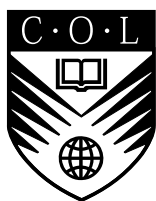
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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

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ISBN 978-1-894975-39-1

Published by:

COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING
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Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada V6E 2E9

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Contents

Preface.....	v
Contributors.....	vii
Acknowledgements	xii
Chapter 1	
Setting the Scene for Interrogating Teacher Education through Open and Distance Learning	1
<i>Abdurrahman Umar and Patrick Alan Danaher</i>	
Chapter 2	
Contemporary Research on Open and Distance Learning in Teacher Education	7
<i>Patrick Alan Danaher and Abdurrahman Umar</i>	
Chapter 3	
Educational Principles and Policies Framing Teacher Education through Open and Distance Learning.....	23
<i>Mary Simpson and Benjamin Kehrwald</i>	
Chapter 4	
Open and Distance Learning for Initial Teacher Education.....	35
<i>Ann Shelton Mayes and Hilary Burgess</i>	
Chapter 5	
A Capability Approach to Open and Distance Learning for In-Service Teacher Education	47
<i>R.E. (Bobby) Harreveld</i>	
Chapter 6	
Learning and Teaching Strategies and Practices in Teacher Education through Open and Distance Learning.....	61
<i>Glen Postle and Mark A. Tyler</i>	
Chapter 7	
Using ICT to Train Teachers in ICT.....	75
<i>Colin Latchem</i>	
Chapter 8	
The Use of Media in Teacher Education through Open and Distance Learning.....	93
<i>Ken Stevens</i>	

Chapter 9	
Using the New Information and Communication Technologies for the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers through Open and Distance Learning	105
<i>Sólveig Jakobsdóttir, Lindy McKeown and Debra Hoven</i>	
Chapter 10	
Creating New Forms of Teacher Education: Open Educational Resources (OERs) and the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) Programme.....	121
<i>Bob Moon</i>	
Chapter 11	
The Cost-Effectiveness of Using Open and Distance Learning in Teacher Education	143
<i>Bruce Thompson</i>	
Chapter 12	
Quality Assurance in Distance Teacher Education: The Experience of Universitas Terbuka	159
<i>Tian Belawati and I.G.A.K. Wardani</i>	
Chapter 13	
Creating New Perspectives on Teacher Education through Open and Distance Learning.....	173
<i>Patrick Alan Danaher and Abdurrahman Umar</i>	

Preface

Now that most countries have made solid progress towards the achievement of universal primary schooling by 2015, the world faces two other major educational challenges. The first, which results partly from the success of the campaign for primary education, is to give older children and young adults opportunities for secondary schooling. This is a massive task. One estimate puts the number of 12- to 17-year-olds who are not receiving education at 400 million (Binder 2006).

Scarcely less daunting is the second global challenge – and the primary motivation for this book – which is the need to recruit and train many millions of teachers. UNESCO estimates that some 10 million teachers must be recruited and trained in less than a decade. They will be needed to: replace the large numbers of teachers due to retire in many countries; complete the drive to universal primary schooling, particularly in Africa and South Asia; and address the challenge of secondary schooling (UNESCO 2008, p. 22).

Sadly, because the status of the teaching profession has declined in all but a few countries, recruiting teachers on this scale may prove to be “mission impossible.” However, even if we can recruit them, it will certainly not be possible to train them using the traditional methods of institutional pre-service education. Open and distance learning (ODL) must be harnessed to the task because many countries have already found that it allows them to provide training of consistent quality to large numbers at low cost.

But the importance of ODL for the future of teacher education is far more than a simple matter of volume and economics. It is an answer to the third major challenge preoccupying education ministers, namely the quality of schooling at all levels. When I met South Africa’s newly appointed Minister of Basic Education, The Hon. Matsie Angelina Motshekga, in 2010, she was proud of her country’s progress in expanding access to primary education but disappointed in the achievements of the pupils. Her fellow ministers worldwide have similar anxieties.

UNESCO has provided a useful analysis of the elements that make for educational quality (UNESCO 2004, pp. 66, 142). Well-trained teachers feature high on the list – provided that their training focuses as much on classroom realities as on pedagogical theories. This is where ODL comes into its own. It not only enables in-service teacher education to take place in the schools, but also, through the growing use of information and communication technology (ICT), it makes possible the creation of virtual communities of practice in which working teachers can learn from experienced practitioners and from each other.

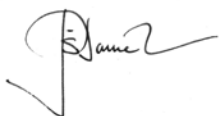
As the book’s title implies, the various chapters explore the challenge of ODL in teacher education from many perspectives. Elsewhere (Daniel 2010, p. 84) I have

noted that that teacher education is a “confused mess” in many parts of the world. The authors in this book have grappled with that confusion and with the often incoherent goals of teacher education. They have had to bring new thinking to the field because teacher education policy inherited from the 20th century has little relevance to the 21st century. It failed to address the crisis of teacher recruitment; it was poorly co-ordinated with school systems; and it did not take account of the potential of ODL and ICTs to do things differently.

The irrelevance of earlier policy has given the authors in this volume a fresh canvas on which to work. Their various contributions examine the research base and underlying principles and policies before exploring new learning and teaching strategies for both pre-service and in-service teacher education. Much space is devoted to the potential of ICT but, lest it be thought that ICT is mainly a rich-world phenomenon, we learn how hundreds of thousands of African teachers are receiving training in their schools through the TESSA (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa) programme and its use of open educational resources.

I congratulate the editors, Patrick Alan Danaher and Abdurrahman Umar, on bringing these contributions together and providing a scene-setting introduction and concluding remarks. For three reasons the book should be seen as a work in progress. First, the world is only just waking up to the crisis of teacher recruitment. Second, teacher education is in a period of transition as its focus switches from long pre-service courses to school-based in-service education and continuous professional development. Third, ODL is itself in a state of flux as it draws upon an increasingly powerful mix of media and technologies.

Teacher educators must find their way across these shifting sands. This book provides some of the answers to the questions they will face as they tackle the most pressing educational challenges of the 21st century.



Sir John Daniel
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

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