Chapter 15
Collaborative Online Learning in Non-Formal Education Settings in the Developing World:
A Best Practice Framework

Stephen Asunka
Regent University College of Science & Technology, Ghana

ABSTRACT

In the present knowledge economy, individuals, particularly working adults, need to continuously acquire purposeful knowledge and skills so they can better contribute towards addressing society's ever-changing developmental challenges. In the developing world however, few opportunities exist for working adults to acquire such new learning experiences through the formal education sector, and this makes it imperative for organizations to develop non-formal education and training programs to help address this need. With the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) worldwide, this article recommends the adoption of Collaborative Online Learning (COL) by non-formal learning organizations as a means of helping address the education and training needs of working adults. The article thus provides an overview of COL, and then draws on the research literature on relevant theories to recommend best-practice strategies for designing and delivering effective and workable COL initiatives within non-formal education settings, particularly in the developing world.

INTRODUCTION

With globalization rapidly creating an information and knowledge-based society, addressing societal problems increasingly requires the application of innovative ideas and technologies rather than

physical abilities as pertained in industrial age (Schrum & Levin, 2009). In addition, as Bates (2005) argues, because of these rapid developments in technology, coupled with and increasing job mobility between jobs and between national frontiers, "the idea of being trained as a youth for the same job for life is becoming less and less tenable" (p. 10). To be relevant in this global

economy therefore, institutions and organizations, irrespective of their fields of operation, need to evolve into what Gardner (1996) calls 'learning organizations.' These are organizations in which, "new and expansive patterns are permitted" (Gardner, 1996, p. 59), and learning becomes a continuous, strategically used process that is integrated with and running parallel to the work of the organization (Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Learning organizations thus provide learning opportunities outside formal educational institutions, and tend to offer knowledge and skills-based training that complement or supplement the abilities of working adults. This non-formal adult learning, which has long been existence in all parts of the world, offer content and learning experiences that are less structured, more flexible and more responsive to localized needs (Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

In the developing world however, most organizations, especially those in non-education related sectors, cannot currently be described as learning organizations as logistical, financial and personnel constraints all contribute in making them incapable of operating as such. Also, many employees within these organizations benefit little from formal higher education as they cannot find the time to participate in the required "full-time" learning activities and processes. Besides, in some cases, the formal higher education programs might be inappropriate for the peculiar needs of individual employees or the organization as a whole. Investing in customized education and training programs can also be a big financial challenge. Yet these establishments need to become learning organizations if they hope to continuously develop expertise and also remain responsive to societal needs in the current age.

Thankfully, advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) in recent years, have expanded education and training opportunities dramatically. With the aid of these technologies, not only can educational resources be made flexible enough to meet individual learner requirements, learning can now also take place anytime

and at any place. Indeed, effective integration of ICTs into formal educational curricula, typically implemented as Collaborative Online Learning (COL) has been demonstrated to be as effective as conventional educational programs, and also more cost-effective (Murphy, Anzalone, Bosch, & Moulton, 2002). Organizations and higher educational institutions in the developed countries are therefore increasingly adopting online delivery of instruction especially to non-school based learners (Simmons, 2002). In keeping with this, institutions in the developing world can also now begin working towards becoming learning organizations by developing and implementing their own COL initiatives, or by participating in other non-formal COL activities that are appropriate to their peculiar needs and operational environments.

Presently however, ICT use in non-formal education in the developing world (with its limited technology infrastructure, and other logistical challenges), is in its infancy. It is therefore not certain which technology supported instructional strategies and learning philosophies will be most appropriate in fostering COL within this context. Meanwhile, developing world institutions cannot simply adopt the practices that currently work well in the developed world, not only because this has been shown not to work well even in formal education (Asunka, 2008), but also because the non-indigenous content and contexts of such practices are likely to be inappropriate in the developing world setting. There is therefore the need to evolve COL best-practice strategies, based on sound theories and practitioner experiences, which can help guide organizations to expand their abilities to foster innovation and change through education and training.

This article contributes in that direction by aiming to serve as a reference resource and a practical guide with which non-formal educational institutions in developing countries can use to assist in the development and implementation of effective COL practices within their peculiar environments. Targeted at instructional designers,

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/collaborative-online-learning-non-formal/69450

Related Content

The Use of Web 2.0 Technologies in the ESL Classroom
Melissa Wrightand Lilian H. Hill (2011). *Encyclopedia of Information Communication Technologies and Adult Education Integration (pp. 102-117).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/use-web-technologies-esl-classroom/43420

Professional Development for Online Educators: Problems, Predictions, and Best Practices
Angela Velez-Solicand Jennifer R. Banas (2014). *Adult and Continuing Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 521-544).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/professional-development-for-online-educators/105262

Creativity, Social Justice and Human Rights within Adult Education
Susannah Brown (2015). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 1-12).*
www.irma-international.org/article/creativity-social-justice-and-human-rights-within-adult-education/125604

Students with Learning Disabilities' Perceptions of Self-Determining Factors Contributing to College Success
Theresa Marie Wegner (2017). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 1-13).*
www.irma-international.org/article/students-with-learning-disabilities-perceptions-of-self-determining-factors-contributing-to-college-success/185507

The Conversable World: Finding Our Compass in A Post 9/11 World
Michael R. Welton (2018). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 14-23).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-conversable-world/206844