Professor Nyameko Barney Pityana was Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa (Unisa) from 2001 until his retirement in 2010. He was a member of the ICDE Executive Committee between 2008 and 2010, and founding chairperson of the African Council for Distance Education between 2004 and 2008. This special edition of *Open Praxis* pays tribute to the achievements of Professor Pityana in furthering the cause of open and distance learning in South Africa, on the African continent and worldwide, and looks ahead to the future of ODL.

Contributors to this special edition are: Olugbemiro Jegede (Guest Editor), Mandla S. Makhanya, Sir John Daniel, Brenda M. Gourley, Nicholas H. Allen, Susan C. Aldridge, Tolly S.A. Mbwette, James C. Taylor and Wayne Mackintosh.

The ICDE Executive Committee at their meeting in Oslo, Norway, March 2010. From left to right: Fredric Litto, Denise Kirkpatrick, Nyameko Barney Pityana, Tian Belawati, Frits Pannekoek, Marta Mena.

Guest Editor: Olugbemiro Jegede
Open Praxis
Special Edition: A Tribute to Nyameko
Barney Pityana

Guest Editor: Olugbemiro Jegede
October 2011
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EDITORIAL

When the Unthinkable Happens

PROFESSOR OLBGBEMIRO JEGEDE
Secretary General/CEO
Association of African Universities

Dr Carl Holmberg, the immediate past Secretary General of the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) in his characteristic humility, mixed with humour sent me an unusual email which stated:

“As you may know we are preparing a special issue of the journal Open Praxis in tribute to Professor Barney Pityana. When I have been looking for an editor different sources have suggested you and I therefore ask if you are willing to help us with this? We will invite persons like yourself with seniority in ODL and in some way connected to Barney Pityana to contribute to the volume. Whatever your answer is on my main question I am most interested in suggestions from your side on contributors. Dear Olugbemiro could you be the editor of this special volume?”

My response, in part, goes thus:

“As you know whatever I can do for ODL, no matter the time it takes me away from my other commitments, I will do so. It is even more so that you are asking me to edit, as a special guest, a publication in honour of a friend, a great scholar and an individual, who has during his time as VC at UNISA done a lot for ODL. So, I have no hesitation whatsoever in accepting to edit/prepare the special edition of Open Praxis.”

I instinctively accepted the invitation to be the special guest editor of this issue and applauded the wise decision to honour our colleague who has distinguished himself in many aspects of life and particularly with his contributions to ODL in South Africa, in Africa and in the world at large. From my position as a practitioner, researcher and an academic administrator within an ODL environment nothing can gladden my heart more than seeing that our community of practitioners has decided to honour Professor Nyameko Barney Pityana with a special edition as tribute to, and celebration of of his contributions to ODL as he steps down as member of the Executive Committee of ICDE following his retirement in December 2010 from the University of South Africa (Unisa) as Vice Chancellor and Principal. My acceptance of this role was not just because of the wonderful persuasive and disarming voice of Carl through his email but, because for once, the community of practitioners including academics, researchers and administrators and managers of ODL worldwide have decided to honour one of our own in his lifetime with such a publication.

How could I ever pass such an opportunity to be part of the celebration of Barney. How would I explain it to myself and others that, for whatever reasons, I could not spare the time in spite of the increasingly busy schedule we run, to add my voice no matter how insignificant, to the global best wishes resonating through this publication to pay tribute to such a remarkable man who is an embodiment of several things to several people.

Nyameko Barney Pityana, a distinguished ODL expert, a theologian, a lawyer, an activist and custodian of human rights, a delightful and respected intellectual and scholar has in very many ways endeared his unique personality to all who have crossed his path. I had my respect for him catapulted to greater height when I saw him combine several of these roles within 4 hours of a Sunday morning which culminated in my attending his church service and listening to him preach from the pulpit. Wasn’t this man the person we were in an ODL meeting together with? Was he not the person charging in an earlier telephone call his advice as a human rights lawyer? Wasn’t this man the person finishing a report as a Vice Chancellor as well as reviewing the papers for the next meeting of the Executive Board of the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE)? And yet he found time out of no time to prepare such a powerful sermon that kept every member of the congregation wanting more? Such is the personality of Barney who would stop at nothing to be sincere in his support and consultation with all and to diligently discharge whatever responsibility he is given. Barney ensured that the ACDE was formed in 2004, he preached the global acceptability of ICDE to all in Africa, he hosted two meetings of the ICDE Standing Conference of Presidents and gave his all to ODL in South Africa through the efficient and strategic management of Unisa during a most challenging time when he had to superintend the merger of Technikon Southern Africa with Unisa. The results of this merger which have yielded wonderful fruits to South Africa are quite glaring to behold.
It therefore gives me a very satisfying and humbling pleasure to welcome you all to this Special Edition of *Open Praxis*. I want to use this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who have made the extra effort to contribute articles to this edition. While appreciating the contributions from the authors, I need to single out Sir John Daniel who in spite of his bereavement having lost his wife of several decades, still found the strength to make his contribution. *Open Praxis* sends condolences to him and his family for the irreparable loss.

While directing your attention to the focus of the special edition, I thought I should put on the table an issue in ODL that has engaged my attention, and those of many others, in recent times. This pertains to the worldwide neglect of the consideration of the theory which drives ODL in favour of blind practice and the ignorant application of the gains of ODL without reflections. I am pleased that all our contributors have in various ways touched on this. I will return to this later.

As Randy Garisson (2000) and many others have alluded to, the theoretical foundations of a field describe and inform the practice and provide the primary means to guide future development. The power of ideas, as represented in our theories, influences practice directly by focusing perspectives, revealing knowledge and suggesting alternatives.

The study, practice and foundations of open and distance learning in the 19th and 20th centuries have been primarily based on distance constraints and approaches which bridged geographical divide by way of organisational strategies such as mass production and delivery of learning packages through flexible modes of operation.

The need for lifelong learning, life-wide learning, education for all, inclusive education, the imperative to democratise education and enhance access to flexible learning have all coalesced to focus on the use of education as a strong instrument for national, community, global and individual development. All these, together with an unprecedented development in information and communication technologies have propelled the practice and use of open and distance learning to the forefront of educational practice and use by nations and progressive communities. The advent of new terminologies, new technologies, new audiences, new programme demands, and new players coupled with the need to use ODL in a hurry to develop nations and people have tended to lead to what is now commonly referred to as conceptual confusion in the practice of ODL. Whereas these may constitute the achievements for the 20th century of the practice of ODL, they have the potential of becoming the challenges for the 21st century, and therefore the next decade of ODL in the world at large.

It does appear that while the theory which guided organisational practice of ODL in the 20th century had been adequate and instrumental to a whole range of development, practitioners and scholars must begin to tinker with the need to search for new theories and philosophies to guide the future practice of ODL. The current shift from organisational to transactional theoretical foundations of ODL may not endure or be sufficient for our future, and indeed current practice of ODL. Issues such as teaching and learning, non-conventional communication modes, new perspectives in instructional development and delivery, the changing profile of students, massive uptake of ODL by organisations and nations, and the central focus of ODL for enhanced access and accelerated development will become dominant in 21st century educational transformation.

We may therefore wish to begin to interrogate ourselves and seek answers to the question as whether ODL, as a field of practice and study, possesses the synthesis of the principles and concepts capable of explaining and predicting development in ODL in the next decade or indeed throughout the 21st century? While this special edition may not have the time or the full orientation to tackle such an issue, it certainly should lurk at the background of all our considerations. Practitioners and ICDE may well give it a serious thought with a view to supporting a full meeting of practitioners, researchers and all other stakeholders on this matter in the near future.

Mandla Makhanya starts the ball rolling by asserting that though Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has established itself globally as a viable means of providing quality education to increasing numbers of disparate students, still the demand for access to higher education continues to grow. He says further that ‘ODL continues to be regarded as the “Cinderella” of higher education delivery, hemmed in on all sides by discriminatory policies, practices and perceptions, and ODL providers are faced with difficult challenges that need to be overcome if its full potential and promise are to be realised’.

Sir John Daniel makes his commentary within the context of how Unisa has developed into a formidable ODL institution during the time of Barney Pityana. He says, ‘No university in the world has faced a more challenging trajectory than Unisa in the last two decades. I refer not only to the daunting task of transforming the philosophy, pedagogy, structures and people of a massive institution while continuing to teach students effectively’.

In directing attention to the ongoing crisis that would not promote the status quo, Brenda Gourley says that, ‘whatever way one looks at the higher education domain, it is clear that the traditional sector is likely
to finally understand the writing on the wall. There are so many easy wins for them. To be sure they will be uncomfortable for staff and quite difficult to implement – but relatively easy when measured against the scale of the alternatives (like wholesale redundancies, for a start). Unsurprisingly, they are beginning to move seriously into the online domain.’ She has listed 15 steps that ODL institutions must take to establish their philosophy and practice in the 21st century, especially in providing access to higher education.

Nicholas Allen and Susan C. Aldridge, in their article follow through what Gourley was stressing by pointing out that Barney has championed ODL as a vehicle to achieve mass access to education in the developing world. They go further to inform us that ‘many readers here may not have been aware of the significant roles that Barney Pityana played earlier in his life as a moral beacon inside and outside of South Africa in the apartheid resistance movement and the struggle for human rights in that country. He has continued that advocacy subsequent to the fall of apartheid in 1994 through today, forcefully making the case for us all that academic leaders have a duty to speak out constructively in public discussions and debates, even if unpopular among the ruling political elites.’

Tolly Mbwette while joining in the argument on new ways to conceptualise ODL and address the emerging philosophy, presents the six pillars that define a well managed ODL university. His article has drawn attention to the apparent complexity and unpredictability of the future and what an ideal future university should be. He advises readers to note the critical role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and services in ODL universities as well as the benefits of partnerships and collaboration in mainstreaming ODL while transforming current ODL institutions into modern ODL universities.

James C. Taylor & Wayne Mackintosh, have propelled the world, in their article ‘Creating an Open Educational Resources University and the Pedagogy of Discovery’, to the emerging novel development in higher education through an international higher education partnership of like-minded innovative institutions to create an Open Education Resource university network. At the moment five institutions (including the University of South Africa), referred to as anchor partners, have joined the OER Foundation in creating the OER Tertiary Education Network and have committed resources to planning the implementation of the OERu. Welcome to the future of ODL and I must urge all of you to stay tuned, as this is what I meant in my title of this editorial by ‘When the Unthinkable Happens?’ Many developments currently taking place including of course the OERu and many others emerging today can easily be regarded as the unthinkable. No one in their right senses would have dreamt 20 years ago of all these new developments in ODL and in higher education in general. We are all in for an exciting future with the unthinkable beginning to happen.

In all his contributions to ODL, Pityana has consistently directed attention to the practice and use of ODL for global benefits and the need for a continuous review of the theories which scaffold this area of human endeavour. Interestingly, the collection of these articles ranging from the Daniel's chronology of ODL development via Unisa through Gourley’s breaking of barriers and need for innovation and invention to Taylor and Mackintosh’s chronicling of what the future of ODL holds for the world and humanity have inadvertently come together very nicely to indicate the necessity to search for new, appropriate, effective and efficient theories to describe, explain and underlie the current and future practice of ODL. The emergence of the new philosophical underpinnings of 21st century ODL will be testimony to Thomas Khun’s idea of epistemological development.

Let me therefore invite you to please enjoy this Special Edition of Open Praxis, carefully and selectively put together in celebration of Professor Nyameko Barney Pityana at such an opportune time when the growth and development of ODL has blossomed into the centre stage of mainstream educational activities in the world.

Thank you.

References


Randy Garisson (2000).
In the past decade, open and distance learning (ODL), and more latterly open distance and e-learning (ODEL) has established itself globally as a viable means of providing quality education to increasing numbers of disparate students, and still the demand for access to higher education continues to grow. However, ODL continues to be regarded as the “Cinderella” of higher education delivery, hemmed in on all sides by discriminatory policies, practices and perceptions. ODL providers are faced with difficult challenges that need to be overcome if its full potential and promise are to be realised.

Two of the most prominent and significant champions of ODL, namely the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) and the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) have articulated some of these challenges as: the status and legitimacy of ODL; the appropriate selection and use of technologies; infrastructural constraints including internet access; inadequate human resource capacity; the evolving student profile and calibre; serious financial, socio-economic and political impediments; and overarching all of these, the very pertinent issue of quality in all of its manifestations.

As ICDE and ACDE continue to grapple with these challenges there has been a growing acceptance and agreement that they cannot be tackled in isolation and that the best outcomes will be achieved through deliberate strategies to draw in all ODL actors across the globe, and to find the best possible means of pooling and sharing knowledge, research and capacity in pursuit of ODL provision that is acknowledged and valued as a quality mode of higher education provision.

What has been required therefore, and what continues to be required, is for people of vision and intellectual acumen and standing, to make the case internationally for distance education, and to contribute to a global distance education strategy that will ultimately realise its true potential. Professor Nyameko Barney Pityana, retired Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa, is one such visionary, intellectual and contributor.

In his Keynote Address at the 5th Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning held in London in July 2008 and themed: Access to Learning for Development, Professor Pityana summed up the potential of ODL in his inimitable style when he stated:

Open and Distance Learning is an idea whose time has come. It is spearheading an innovative, technology-driven wave of education provision, both public and private, that is rendering international and national borders increasingly porous and challenging traditional and existing notions of dedicated spaces for face-to-face education versus so-called “distance” education. I say “education provision” advisedly, because as we all know ODL is not confined to the higher education domain or to the traditional dedicated distance education institutions. Its promise and possibilities are also being explored and implemented by many schools and residential universities that are faced with the same kinds of technological advances, constraints, dynamics and challenges as those that have caused traditional distance education institutions to turn to ODL models of provision. Parallel to that we find a burgeoning wave of private education providers who are also tapping into the promise of ODL. With its hallmark flexibility and adaptability, ODL is traversing new domains and opening up hitherto impossible opportunities for many whose circumstances would otherwise have consigned them to the graves of lost opportunity and wasted intellect.

Perhaps what we as ODL practitioners acknowledge and what we quietly celebrate, is that the growth of ODL is testament to the demise of exclusivity in higher education provision. The exclusionary triangle of access, cost and quality has been broken by technology and its evolution, allowing broad access to quality education at an affordable price. In short, the growth of ODL has facilitated mass access to quality higher education. It is how we respond to the opportunity that this presents, that will determine its, and our own, future growth and success. (Pityana, 2008)

His simultaneous acknowledgement of the potential of ODL and his caution in terms of our response thereto, speak to the serendipitous combination of gifts that characterise Barney Pityana as a visionary and a deeply incisive and analytical thinker. This has been borne out time and again in his signal contributions to ODL internationally, continentally and nationally, made all the more remarkable when one considers the context from which they have derived.

The life of Barney Pityana has been marked by extremes. Uncommon controversies have been matched by uncommon accolades. His fraught education, his political affiliations and his unflinching commitment to
human rights have shaped him and informed his fearlessness in speaking to his truth. He is simultaneously a theologian, a lawyer, a passionate human rights activist and advocate, and a consummate scholar with a voracious appetite for new knowledge and a mindset that instigates and welcomes innovation and dissent. In referring to the critical influences on his journey of development he asserts:

I owe it to Steve [Biko] that I was introduced to a depth of intellectual learning and development much beyond mere prescribed texts, and to a critical engagement with the history and culture of our people. I count Steve as among this nation’s greatest intellectual figures that circumstance denied the opportunity to blossom forth and to flower this nation in his generation. I am bound to remember Steve at times when much kerfuffle and obfuscation in our environment holds sway, and men seem to lose their reason, to paraphrase Shakespeare. Sadly though, it has to be that this is the moment when this nation celebrates its intellectuals, its writers, thinkers and creators. On the contrary, watch who are the most celebrated – it’s the maverick politician, a thoughtless youth leader and a loudmouthed trade unionist; it is the footballer, a soapie star, a kwai sta, what I call a ‘zing’ musician; or maybe, the new BEE millionaires. Yes, it is rarely the writer or scholar; anyone who aspires to be an intellectual is often viewed with contempt. It is definitely not the most attractive thing to become a career academic in such circumstances. (Pityana, 2007)

Those who worked closely with Barney knew that he was seldom comfortable with the status quo for very long. His vision, his natural curiosity, his avid interest in the warp and weft of life, and his constant striving for the betterment or improvement of existing projects meant that much of what he engaged in was in a continuous cycle of growth and improvement. That is certainly true of the University of South Africa, which under his leadership, successfully navigated an extremely complex merger to arrive at a modern, well planned ODL institution whose vision - to be the African University in the service of humanity - reflects an understanding of the genuine potential that ODL has, to serve not only South Africa but the African Continent and to an extent, the world.

His contributions to distance education have been as fundamental and influential as they are formidable, particularly on the Continent of Africa. As a member of ICDE he was part of the meeting that first mooted the idea of the African Council for Distance Education at a meeting of the ICDE Standing Committee of Presidents held at Unisa in October 2002. At that time, unlike Europe and Asia, Africa did not have an association of distance education providers, and participation by Africa in the activities of ICDE was very limited, the Unisa conference being the first occasion when Africans attended in reasonably large numbers, albeit as observers (because they were not members of ICDE).

In pursuit of that idea, and driven in large measure by the University of South Africa under the tireless leadership of Professor Pityana, the founding conference of ACDE was subsequently held at Egerton University in Njoro, Kenya in January 2004, with Professor Pityana being appointed its founding Chairperson.

The 2005 ACDE conference acknowledged the enormous backlogs and deficits in higher education in Africa and it was accepted that any attempt to redress these backlogs would require major investment in technology, infrastructure and people. At the same time the necessity of ensuring that distance education is quality assured, relevant and flexible, uses innovative modes of delivery and modern technology, and commits to high levels of learner support, was affirmed. In the ensuing years Professor Pityana worked tirelessly to that end, determined to advance ODL on the continent and internationally. Mention can be made for example, of the ACDE stakeholder workshop hosted by Unisa in 2008, that engaged precisely those issues and fostered the vision of collaborative open and distance learning for Africa that affirms African-ness and inspires pride in the quality of offerings. There can be no doubt that the current drive toward harmonised, quality ODL provision took root in a more tangible form at the stakeholder’s meeting. Clearly Professor Pityana has been a driving force in the positioning of ODL on the African continent through his role on the executive of the ACDE and his role as the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa.

In 2010 Unisa was privileged to host for a second time, the ICDE Standing Conference of Presidents. This meeting was a milestone occasion in that for the first time the entire ACDE executive membership was invited to attend. That they did so testified to the growing sense of common purpose amongst ODL practitioners that is articulated so clearly in ICDE’s 4th 2010 – 2012 strategic objective, namely, “to foster co-operation between members.”

Through his membership on the Executive Committee of ICDE, Professor Pityana has profiled ODL on the African Continent to an international audience. Equally, through his chairpersonship of ACDE, Professor Pityana has contributed significantly to raising the profile of distance education on the African Continent and to fostering the kinds of partnerships and collaboration that will strengthen and promote its agenda.

As a sought after international speaker, Professor Pityana has faithfully represented the voice of distance education at a multitude of diverse fora. In his addresses he advanced the aims of distance education internationally, and not only as an African imperative. His addresses were often controversial, but they never
failed to get to the root of the challenges facing distance education and the potential that ODL has, to play a pivotal role in socio-economic development nationally and globally. He has been one of distance education’s most committed ambassadors and his contribution to distance education nationally, continentally and internationally is very significant.

Our world needs visionary ODL leaders who have the requisite discernment to make the case for ODL in a convincing and eloquent manner. Professor Barney Pityana is such a leader. At the University of South Africa we are extremely proud of the role that he has played, not only in positioning Unisa as the foremost proponent and practitioner of ODL on the Continent, but also in advancing the cause of distance education continentally and internationally. We salute our friend and colleague and commend him formally on his contribution to our profession and to ODL.

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Pityana, Nyameko Barney, Keynote opening address delivered by Prof N Barney Pityana at the Wordfest 2007, held in the Red Lecture Theatre, Eden Grove Building, Rhodes University Campus, on Monday 2 July 2007.
Unisa’s Unique Academic Odyssey

Sir John Daniel
President & Chief Executive Officer
Commonwealth of Learning

Unisa has a unique history.

In 1871 the government of Cape Town applied for permission to hold University of London Exams. For more than 150 years the University of London External System has been a flagship for all forms of distance education. Its most distinguished student was Nelson Mandela, one of five students in London’s programme who went on to win Nobel Prizes. He is also Unisa’s most famous graduate.

London was a long way away in the 1870s, and the local tutors wanted to make the curriculum and exams more relevant to South Africa. So in 1873 the Cape Parliament created the University of the Cape of Good Hope – what a wonderfully evocative name for an institution of higher learning! It received a Royal Charter from Queen Victoria in 1877, giving its degrees universal recognition.

For the first years of its existence, it operated like the External Studies System of the University of London, as a federal body that offered examinations but not tuition. Unisa’s Department of Music still continues this function.

In 1916 the University of the Cape of Good Hope was renamed the University of South Africa and two years later the headquarters moved to Pretoria. Just like the University of London, Unisa had a number of university colleges within a federal structure; and, as at the University of London, these colleges became, one by one, fully autonomous universities. They bear the names: Witwatersrand, Natal, Rhodes, Bloemfontein, Potchefstroom, Zululand and Pretoria. Unisa was the nursery of South Africa’s higher education system.

In the 1940’s, as its colleges became fully-fledged universities, Unisa entered another phase. It was clear that students trying to study on their own for examinations needed tuition, so Unisa began teaching them by correspondence. With the establishment of the Division of External Studies in 1946, South Africa’s first university also became the pioneer of higher distance education in the western world, a quarter of a century before the UK Open University admitted its first students. Since then Unisa has been a metaphor for the turbulent, but truly inspiring evolution of South Africa itself.

I first came into contact with Unisa at a conference of ICDE’s predecessor, the International Council for Correspondence Education, in the UK in 1975. As Unisa staff made a presentation, delegates from the SACHED Trust distributed pamphlets protesting apartheid education policies. Ben Turok, a South African exile, and I presented a joint paper on Teaching by Telephone and, in my conversations with him, I learned how Unisa’s role was contested, despite its multiracial student body, by those who had a vision of a new South Africa based on democracy and equality. He later became a Member of Parliament in democratic South Africa.

Two decades later, as that new South Africa began to emerge, I knew some of the protagonists, both foreign and South African, on each side of the vigorous debate about Unisa’s role in the new polity. Some urged closing Unisa because it had reinforced the apartheid system. I sided with those who believed that a better strategy was to harness Unisa’s remarkable administrative systems and logistics to the goals of the new nation.

That was what happened, but of course the transition was not plain sailing. No university in the world has faced a more challenging trajectory than Unisa in the last two decades. I refer not only to the daunting task of transforming the philosophy, pedagogy, structures and people of a massive institution while continuing to teach students effectively. While engaged in that transition, Unisa faced the further challenge of bringing together Unisa, Technikon SA and Vista University into one of the world’s largest mega-universities.

Hundreds of people were among the dedicated artisans of those wrenching changes, but I pay special tribute to three of them. I met Professor Antony Melck on my first visit to South Africa. Since then I have greatly admired his roles in steering Unisa through difficult moments and in bringing his clear economic thinking to bear on the financial structures of a whole new South African higher education system. The name Jenny Glennie is synonymous with distance learning in South Africa. She was a Unisa tutor in the 1970s and has been involved in its governance for over a decade. Today she represents South Africa on the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth of Learning.

Professor Barney Pityana has, in his visionary, principled and humane manner, been the reassuring face of Unisa to the world. I pay tribute to him for his outstanding leadership of the transformation of Unisa and
the expansion of distance learning across Africa. Unisa was extraordinarily fortunate to have such a remarkable man at the helm as it negotiated those troubled seas. It is typical of his commitment both to equality and to learning that Professor Pityana enrolled as a student at Unisa while serving as Vice-Chancellor.

He is a model to everyone in the global distance education community.
Force Majeure: Necessity Being the Mother of Invention

Professor Brenda M Gourley
Former Vice Chancellor, Open University of the United Kingdom

Introduction

Once upon a time, what seems like long, long ago, there were three parallel universes: the universe of the traditional universities, the universe of the open and distance learning providers, and the universe of private sector providers of higher education. Each universe had its own clubs and societies and journals and even refused to accept membership of those from another universe – more especially those from the third universe. Some bold members made excursions into other universes but found they did not really share much in common and they retreated unnoticed and their disappearance went unremarked.

The traditional universities (with some notable exceptions) have not fundamentally changed the model that was invented hundreds of years ago. The last few years have seen a whole slew of books and articles documenting what many realize is a system in crisis - unsustainable, even broken. Even in America, the home of many of the most prestigious universities in the world, there is criticism in high places. The Spellings Commission (2006) had this to say: “What we have learnt over the last year makes clear that American higher education has become what, in the business world, would be called a mature enterprise: increasingly risk-averse, at times self-satisfied, and unduly expensive. It is an enterprise that has yet to address the fundamental issues of how academic programs and institutions must be transformed to serve the changing needs of a knowledge economy. It has yet to successfully confront the impact of globalization, rapidly evolving technologies, an increasingly diverse and aging population, and an evolving marketplace characterized by new needs and new paradigms.” (Quoted in Wildavsky et al, page 4)

The second universe, the ODL universe was mostly driven by the need to widen participation in higher education. It often does not have the entry barriers that traditional universities pride themselves on and therefore (to some extent, at least) admitted students that traditional universities had no wish, much less capacity, to accept. Many (like the UK Open University) were nearly strangled at birth by members of the traditional universities and other conservative forces who could not conceive of a model that did not emulate their own. The Open University had something to prove and prove it they did – and thereby made history and paved the way for many other such institutions to follow. In fairness they achieved acceptance with the help of academics in the traditional system who rallied to the cause (of widening participation) and acted as part-time staff. The best made good (even superb, in some cases) materials and good student support central planks of their offering. (The word ‘distance’ is mostly a misnomer because the best programmes are in fact a blend of face-to-face and ‘distance’ and more and more use technology to improve the student experience. ‘Blended learning’ or ‘mixed mode delivery’ are better descriptors.) As to what courses, what disciplines and what ‘products’ to provide, they had it ‘easy’ in the sense that they simply offered the main courses that students could get in the traditional system but they paid infinitely more attention to learning and teaching strategies and they produced much more in the way of physical material. New technologies and the social networks they enabled were embraced with some caution but the technologies did help them in their mission and there are lots of good examples of innovation in the sector. A few have even built solid research reputations.

The third universe occupied by the private providers had the easiest task of all. They saw the rising demand for higher education as a business opportunity. They picked the most popular (and therefore most cost-effective) courses to provide. They made no pretensions as to research reputation and thereby avoided massive costs. They often contracted out to good academics in the traditional sector for the production of materials – and sometimes even the delivery. And they welcomed the technology with open arms. They have grown at a phenomenal rate and indeed over a third of students worldwide are with private providers. In most countries they are no longer shunned and indeed are increasingly seen as part of the solution to higher education supply where government finances cannot fund all the necessary places. They are more and more in both the ‘traditional’ and ‘online’ domains – and there are several instances of partnerships with the other ‘universes’ – a precursor of what is to come.
Driving forces (as in ‘force majeure’)

Demographics and social justice

“Demographics will continue to be a driving force for development and reform in the coming decades. The patterns and geological scope will vary, but the basic thrust will remain.” (UNESCO, page xix) Quite apart from the fact that the population of the world is growing, the mix of the student body will become more diverse in terms of gender, age, time committed (part- or full-time), social background and abilities, place of origin, to name but some. A continuing and growing (in some parts of the world) emphasis on human rights – and the right to education in particular – is placing pressure on institutions that do not necessarily have the capacity to accommodate such broad agendas. The need for life-long learning not only brings with it additional cohorts of students but also stretches the capacity of faculty in what needs to be provided.

Knowledge explosion

The sheer explosion of ‘knowledge’ – new disciplines and sub-disciplines, multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies – have added enormous complexity to the academic endeavour. In so doing it has also added cost. There is a cost to the research effort needed to stay at least academically ‘respectable’ and there is a cost to making additional choices available to students. There is also a cost in the administration of complex entities. But the basic fact of this explosion also raises questions about strategy. No institution can be all things to all people and most institutions are good at adding choices and not particularly good at cutting back. The increase in ‘knowledge’ is not going to stop and this will be something that forces choices, sooner rather than later. Such choices might well lead to partnerships with other institutions, more use of open educational material – and different forms of delivery. This is likely to be one of the ways in which the different universes of yesteryear start coming together. There are early intimations – but they are still at the margins.

Costs

There are several studies on the costs of higher education over time. All come to the same conclusion. The present traditional system is unsustainable. As the present financial crisis takes its toll the costs of higher education have to be questioned. In the more developed countries, it is unsustainable at present levels and in the less developed countries it is clear that the backlog in provision is so large that it is simply not feasible to replicate the traditional model and the infrastructure it requires – even if sufficient academically qualified people could be found to staff such endeavours.

Responses by universities to government subsidy cuts have been predictable: increasing class sizes and teaching loads, substituting lower cost part-time faculty for higher cost full-time academic staff, outsourcing certain activities – and putting up fees. Several national policies call for the individual student to bear part of the cost since they will benefit from the education they receive. The idea of education being a public good seems to have died a quiet death.

So far (and exceptions are at the margins), as Wildalsky et al (page 244) remark “there has been little of the fundamental rethinking – of faculty roles, use of technology, student-learning measurement, even collaboration with for-profits – that should be the hallmark of serious campus reform efforts.” The budget cuts however are so large that there can be little doubt that the changes that can be found in some institutions are likely to be adopted by many others; that the partnerships that are taking place are likely to grow in number and ambition; and that the government incentives and policy changes will grow to make these an imperative. Already many universities make considerable sums from their subsidiary activities (patenting intellectual property rights, spin-out companies and such) but these are in the minority and can hardly be held out as the answer to this most obvious of forces for change. It is said that ‘no crisis should be wasted’ and if ever institutions and the academics that make up their educational provision are under pressure, that time is now.

Technology

Technology and the social networks and possibilities it has enabled are undoubtedly the most dramatic of forces for change – and that fact is not one that pertains just to education. And yet if we compare how industry has harnessed the technology and how education has done so there is no contest – except for the online educational institutions. If we add to this the research that is coming out of the neurosciences about how the brain works and how people learn, we are only at the beginning of a whole new wave of pedagogical
leaps forward. Technology offers also a way of growing student numbers, a way of spreading costs and increasing revenue.

**Students as consumers**

In many countries of the world students constitute an entirely different generational species – what some call the ‘net-generation’. Many know a lot more about the technology than their professors. Every year the research done by EDUCAUSE and the New Media Consortium emphasises this divide – almost a clash of civilisations! These students can not only find material (often a lot better than they can get at the average university) they can also tune in to gurus in the field in which they are studying and make unhappy comparisons. And they can make their unhappiness public – witness ratemyprofessor.com. They are less and less likely to be satisfied with ways of doing things that to them seem prehistoric. As they struggle to pay for their expensive educations they are likely to have part-time jobs and complicated timetables. Why sit through (often) mediocre lectures at inconvenient times when they can have the material podcasted to them at times that suit them? And we know there is much more. The fact is students are, and will continue to be, a force for change. The government of the United Kingdom has even built their power as ‘consumers’ into their latest policy thinking.

**A crisis unlikely to promote the status quo**

Whatever way one looks at the higher education domain, it is clear that the traditional sector is likely to finally understand the writing on the wall. There are so many easy wins for them. To be sure they will be uncomfortable for staff and quite difficult to implement – but relatively easy when measured against the scale of the alternatives (like wholesale redundancies, for a start). Unsurprisingly, they are beginning to move seriously into the online domain. As Christensen and Eyring point out (page 330) they “have all of the assets needed to compete effectively in the online environment. The subject matter expertise of their full-time faculty members and their existing campus computer systems give them a potential quality and cost advantage in delivering online education. Their real advantage ... is their ability to meld online and face-to face learning experiences.” Their expensive infrastructure needs to be used for a larger proportion of the year and there are moves to reduce the time over which a degree may be achieved. This latter can be done by drastically reducing the university vacations, by more modularization, by allowing a mixture of online and residential choices and other hardly contentious moves – moves more and more obvious to policy makers to say nothing of the students and their parents bearing the costs of the rather relaxed timetables so far tolerated. Another advantage for many of them is that they have old, established and powerful brands! It is said that universities are one of the longest surviving organisational forms (the other being the church). They have survived because they have adapted. It is likely that under the extreme forces described above they will adapt again. They certainly have the intellectual capacity. This time it will have to be put to use at a less leisurely pace!

**Steps to be taken by individual ODL institutions**

This brings us to the ODL sector and its future given likely sea changes in the traditional sector, and given that we are now (finally) all going to be living in the same universe! In bracing itself for a whole new wave of not only competition but (one hopes) collaboration, there are steps that individual ODL institutions can take. Enumerated below are some of them:

1. **Look to the retention and reward criteria of faculty.** There is a growing but insufficient body of academics skilled in the design and delivery of online and blended learning. They will become the target of the traditional institutions seeking to enter the field. The reward criteria of most institutions are geared more to research outputs and less to teaching outcomes, much less use of the new media. For example, some ODL institutions have ‘media stars’ in their midst, people who attract astonishingly large audiences in the blogsphere and twittering universe. They are doing much to make some disciplines more accessible to young people especially and in a very real way contribute to the mission of widening participation. They should be rewarded for their efforts and imaginative use of the media. Maybe a new mantra can be introduced: blog or perish! (Jeff Jarvis, page 214) This is just one example. There are dozens of others not being discussed in the decision-making forums of universities talking about hiring and promoting. The fact is that the reformulation of the role of faculty needs changing and the faculty contract needs updating in the process.
2. **Invest in staff development and diversify the staff base.** It is difficult enough for faculty to keep abreast of their disciplines much less the technology available. The fact is however that unless they are well-informed about the technologies they will be unable to design interesting learning journeys for their students. Institutions need to make this as easy as possible for them but also make it a non-negotiable of their contracts. Diversity plays to the quality dimension as well as keeping the institution imbued with many world views.

3. **Invest in performance management.** Many universities still do not practise performance management in any meaningful way. If staff are to get the encouragement and incentives they need to move significantly forward, this nettle must be grasped.

4. **Invest in performance indicators and management analytics.** Building on the previous point, most institutions collect a lot of data about students and timetables and course choices (to name but some) but translating this data into meaningful management information is another matter. Some of the leading brands in commerce and industry are leading precisely because they have acted on the analyses that the welter of information that technology enables. ‘Evidence-based’ management has to find expression throughout the institution.

5. **Invest in a ‘customer relationship management’ system.** An organisation that understands that it is in a ‘market’ and that market has to be monitored, that competitors have to be monitored and that the nature and profile of its ‘customers’ have to be analysed and understood. It also has to be responsive to that market. A sophisticated Customer Relations Management system helps to improve service and collect data. It also understands that business cases have to be constructed and respected in a marketplace that does not wait patiently by for a product that it needs here and now. This may sound self-evident – but ODL institutions cannot test a ‘product’ in the lecture theatre or seminar group. They invest large sums of money in course material etc. This cannot be on the whim of a solitary or even small group of academics. We live in a ‘consumer society’ whether we like that or not, and consumers behave in particular ways and have come to expect institutions to behave in particular ways as well.

6. **Invest in student retention** (and harness the knowledge being acquired in the neurosciences about learning behaviours); pursue collaborative learning opportunities for the students; seek out and use remedial software being developed in the private sector and elsewhere. Apart from student retention being desirable for obvious reasons, it could be a major competitive advantage in competing with the traditional sector which has appalling drop-out statistics. Many ODL institutions also have bad drop-out rates. Either way, it is unacceptable – and bad business. It makes nonsense out of the promise of ‘widening participation’ and it is unfair to the student.

7. **Invest in web presence.** As Google has taught us in the last few years, if you are not easily ‘discoverable’ you might as well not exist. Managing the institution’s web presence has become a powerful marketing and image-making tool – and much information can be gained from the users of the site.

8. **Invest in brand management.** Again, one should not under-estimate the power of brands. More and more universities pay attention to the ‘ranking’ tables that have become so prevalent. Most of them are not very carefully designed and many based on doubtful premises. But they tell you that in a world which is filled with a bewildering number of choices, these can be at least a signpost. The secret of good branding is that the brand projected has ‘integrity’. The point of this in the context of this article is that many traditional universities have powerful brands. They are the new competitors here. Pay attention.

9. **Invest in quality and quality assurance systems.** ODL does not have good press in many parts of the world. This is because education providers too often provide a service which is (to say the least) inadequate. There is no substitute for quality. There does need to be debate in every institution about what ‘quality’ means in terms of its particular mission. Much is being said of universities in the current financial crisis in which many parts of the world find themselves: that they do not provide an educational experience relevant to current circumstances; that it is an experience not ‘fit for purpose’; that it is insufficiently engaged with the problems of the communities in which they are embedded; insufficiently engaged with the big issues that beset our world. These may all be true to a greater or lesser extent but it is interesting that more and more universities do make ‘civic engagement’ part of their central mission and student volunteering is a growing force. ODL institutions have very large numbers and have the opportunity to be a large force for change and make a significant contribution to the debate of what constitutes ‘quality’ in this complex world – especially as many of their students are already part of the workforce.

10. **Invest in technology (as well as educational technology).** The point need hardly be emphasised. What can be emphasised is that there is also no reason to reinvent the wheel. Open Source programmes
like Moodle show the way. There is a great deal of excellent examples in the use of technology (including games that teach real skills and knowledge) and packaged software developed by enthusiastic professionals. Encourage their use and develop more.

11. Manage focussed research endeavours (and use technological expertise to enter new areas). All universities need to have some research profile. What they cannot afford is an unfocussed and unmanaged research endeavour. Research funding agencies are forcing the pace here in many parts of the world. Research has become, like everything else in this domain, expensive. The fact is that it is possible to build a reputation if what funds that are available are carefully focussed and targeted on activity that has the best chance of making a difference. One would hope that ODL institutions have somewhat more technically competent staff than most other institutions (on average) and they will get a head start on the opportunities for new research rendered possible by technology.

12. Manage the ‘product’ portfolio and ensure focus and disinvestment where necessary; harness the treasure of open educational resources (freeing up staff time to serve more students or engage in more scholarship, i.e. more focussed use of time); put some effort into ensuring ‘employability’ of students (and give credit for both internships and volunteering activities) in this world where job experience is more difficult to come by.

13. Accredit courses done elsewhere and encourage diversity in the choices student make in their combinations of subjects. There are not nearly enough attempts in the university system generally to recognise work that students have done elsewhere – and could do elsewhere. The system is unnecessarily expensive with each university believing it has to develop its own special version of quite straight forward courses. How different can Chemistry 101 be?

14. Seek partnerships in both traditional and private sector. Tapscott and Williams (of Wikinomics and Macrowikinomics fame) have illustrated how the possibilities and realities of collaboration have changed the world. We are already seeing interesting partnerships and collaborative enterprises in the education arena. There will be more – and some might even be in the form of ‘hostile takeovers’ (to use the language of the market). If state-supported universities refuse to grasp the necessity of change and persist in using a model which can no longer be afforded, one can well imagine governments ready to sell them off to the highest bidder. Interesting times lie ahead.

15. Seek bridges between formal and informal learning. What we see happening on the web are multiple learning communities, interest groups, exchanging information, building systems, playing complicated games. Kamenetz describes some of the excitement of this in her book DIY U – Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of High Education. Many people are able to take their learning into their own hands and they learn valuable skills in the process. The sadness is that they are not given credit for this learning, a leg-up on the educational ladder of success. While the recognition of prior learning is to be found at the margins of institutions, it has not gained ground. It is a rich seam waiting to be mined.

Conclusion

Few would argue that we live in perilous times, times perhaps like no other: times of war and poverty, times where in absolute numbers there has never been a greater need for education – possibly the only sustainable way out of that poverty; times of financial and political crises; times even of moral crisis – for how else can we explain the huge disparities between rich and poor? Many have argued that universities are institutions – perhaps the only institutions – that can play a central role in improving the well-being of society. This can only be so if they are functioning, affordable and cognisant and responsive to that central role. It is argued here however that universities are at a critical crossroad. Put in another way (as Christensen and Eyring do, page xxii): “They are both at risk of competitive disruption and potentially poised for an innovative-fueled renaissance.” Such risk cannot be said to only be carried by the traditional universities. Perhaps in somewhat different ways, the risks extend to other organisational forms. Whatever the form, the contention argued here is that the forces are so strong and so compelling that universities have no choice but to respond – and in so doing will break down the barriers that have existed between the various universes described here – and herald a new age of invention and innovation.

References


Pityana: Visionary Service to a Global Community

Dr Nicholas H Allen
Provost Emeritus & Collegiate Professor
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AND

Dr Susan C Aldridge
President
University of Maryland University College

We are delighted and honored for this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of our friend and colleague, Professor Nyameko Barney Pityana.

We at University of Maryland University College (UMUC) have known Barney Pityana from different vantage points in our participation in ICDE over the past decade and as principals in the promising partnership that has emerged between UMUC and Unisa. From these interactions we have arrived to a consistent picture of Barney as a transformational leader of great vision, impeccable integrity, and as a person with an inspiring belief in the promise and power of education for all.

Our planet needs this sort of leadership today more than ever. We face a global education crisis at the tertiary level. Major economic, demographic, and workforce shifts are placing increasing strains on governments and education systems around the world. Global population growth continues to spiral upward toward 8 billion people. With nearly a third of the planet’s population under 15, the demand for tertiary education is expected to reach 263 million by 2025 given current growth rates. (Daniel, J. and Uvalić-Trumbić, S., 2011)

Fulfilling this need has become an imperative for nations in order to remain or become competitive in a global economy where the fastest growing jobs require a tertiary degree at the 2-year level or higher. The demand for a higher degree is also driven by a cross cultural belief of people everywhere who see education as a human right and as the hope for a better job and role in society. Minority populations in different countries see education as the door of opportunity for their children to take an equal seat in society and to open doors in the workforce. As well, aging members already in the workforce see the necessity to return to school in order to remain in the employment market. All these shifts increasingly place acute pressure on traditional education systems.

To meet these challenges, we need education leaders who think differently and who can move their organizations to re-visualize national educational pipelines and to leverage scarce resources through the strategic use of distance education and technology systems. Fortunately for South Africa, for ICDE, and indeed the worldwide tertiary education community, we have had such a leader as Barney Pityana at the helm of Unisa during the first decade of the 21st century.

Appointed Principal and Vice Chancellor of the old University of South Africa in 2001, Barney immediately faced the demands of the new South African government to expand access and to merge two other institutions, Technikon Southern Africa and Vista University, into his operations. This change formally took place in 2004 from which the mega university emerged that we know today as Unisa. Merely six years later, more than 21,000 students would graduate annually with diplomas and degrees from Unisa, a 52% increase over the number when the merger took place. Unisa has grown in size to an institution of over 300,000 students, the largest comprehensive university on the African continent. These enormous institutional challenges could not have been achieved successfully without strong, transformational leadership and a consistent, personal appeal to individual faculty and staff to excel. Barney’s address to the Unisa Senate in March 2010 well illustrates his approach when he urged: “[E]very member of staff at Unisa to examine their own commitment to its future as an academic institution of excellence…We need a solid resolve to teach effectively and to offer our students care and supervision that will ensure their success in their studies. The academic reputation of all of us, and this University, is in our hands.” (Pityana, N.B., 2010)

Barney has championed ODL as a vehicle to achieve mass access to education in the developing world. But not just access: “ODL is not the cheap way out,” he has insisted; rather it must be in the delivery of affordable, quality education. From the beginning of his tenure at Unisa he has seen the great potential of ODL for fulfilling its promise through the wise use of technology: “It is clearly the case that ODL has become an
intrinsic feature of ways of learning for modern people...ODL must also catch up with developments in technology and embrace elements in e-learning...For all these reasons, Unisa needs to be serious about ODL.” (Pityana, N.B., 2009)

Barney has also been a powerful international voice in the global “Education for All” movement as a liberation vehicle of the developing world. He has pushed for Unisa to become the thought leader for higher education in Africa and to take leadership in advocating the social imperatives of higher education. Referring to the Unisa vision, “Towards the African university in the service of humanity,” he reminded his colleagues in 2009: “[T]he consistency of our message will be reflected in what and how we do our business; the extent to which we seek to reflect the African personality and thought, our practice as a university in the best traditions of a university, and the manner in which our institution is devoted to service of the other than the self in our programmes, in our intellectual preoccupations and in our knowledge agenda. Our staff and students, as well as the public at large, expect some moral consistency between the various assertions and our programmes and organization.” (Pityana, N.B., 2009)

Barney has aptly recognized that the analogies of developed and developing world are over-simplistic views, and that the two must come together as equals in the context of the global situation in which we now live. To this end he has gently reminded those of us from the developed world to come to terms with past history and to adjust our perspectives when dealing with our colleagues in the developing world. (Pityana, Nyameko Barney, 2009)

Many readers here may not have been aware of the significant roles that Barney Pityana played earlier in his life as a moral beacon inside and outside of South Africa in the apartheid resistance movement and the struggle for human rights in that country. He has continued that advocacy subsequent to the fall of apartheid in 1994 through today, forcefully making the case for us all that academic leaders have a duty to speak out constructively in public discussions and debates, even if unpopular among the ruling political elites.

We in ICDE have been most fortunate to have known and benefited from Barney’s leadership and vision from his service on the ICDE Executive Committee. Asked to run for election to the Committee during the transition to a new Constitution in 2007, he did so without hesitation once convinced the change was a sincere effort of the organization to put its house in order and to attain global leadership in the ODL community. His election brought a strong presence to the Executive Committee from the developing world. Barney has pressed for the global membership to become more involved in ICDE decision making and has insisted on a high level of accountability and transparency in ICDE leadership. He has urged the Executive Committee and the membership to become stronger advocates of ODL in our dealings with education policy makers around the globe.

We think a fitting close to this tribute is to return to Barney’s own words, addressed to the Unisa Senate in July 2009 in a moving appeal for the institution to excel: “[I]f we intend our students to be builders of a sustainable world, of a caring society, of excellence and achievement characterized by social justice and equity, economic sufficiency and a healthy environment, then the manner in which we relate to one another, conduct our personal and institutional relations, and our attitude to our work and to society must not be at odds with what we believe.” (Pityana, Nyameko Barney, 2009) ‘Inspiring thoughts to guide us all as we face the challenges ahead.

We wish Nyamko Barney Pityana every success in his new role as Rector of the College of the Transfiguration, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa, and trust that in this role, and in whatever others he takes in the future, we shall continue to benefit in his wisdom and inspiration. Thank you Barney!

References


What Makes a Well Managed Modern Open and Distance Learning (ODL) University Much Closer to the ‘Ideal University of the Future’?

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The paper starts by defining a university and showing the inherent bias of most of the definitions towards the traditional university. The author recommends that the traditional university should not be confused with the so-called conventional universities that are no longer that conventional. After defining distance education or learning, the author presents his understanding of a modern Open and Distance Learning (ODL) university. Based on hands-on experience of managing and transforming both the traditional and an ODL university, the paper presents the six pillars that define a well-managed ODL university. The paper presents the apparent complexity and unpredictability of the future prior to presentation of what may be considered to be an ideal future university. The critical role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and services in ODL universities as well as the benefits of partnerships and collaboration are covered prior to presenting peculiar constraints that may prevent or delay developing country ODL universities from transforming into a modern ODL university. The paper demonstrates that a well-managed modern ODL university is pretty close to the ideal university of the future.

Introduction

Literature (Newman, 2008) provides an ancient definition of a university in the Latin language as meaning “Studium Generale” that can be literally translated to mean “School of Universal Learning”. On the other hand, Wikianswers (http://wiki.answers.com, referenced 28 July 2011) describes a university in its simplest language as, “An entire educational system. It would thus include an undergraduate college, schools, research centres, administration, affiliates and so on”. This definition indirectly assumes existence of some sort of a campus with some academic units without being too explicit on the mode of delivery. In order to realize how complex the definition of a university can be dependent on a variety of experiences of the authors, Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University, referenced 2 August 2011) describes a university as “an institution of higher education and research which grants academic degrees in a variety of subjects. It somehow goes on to define a university as a corporation that provides both undergraduate education and postgraduate education.” It can be seen that, this definition essentially introduces the word “corporation” rather than the use of the word “institution” that the author feels would fit better in describing it whether the ownership is public or private or indeed a Public Private Partnership (PPP) which is not unusual nowadays. Wikipedia (ibid.), explains further that the word university having been derived from the Latin words “universitas magistrorum et scholarium” roughly means “community of teachers and scholars”.

It is further reported in literature (ibid.) that the word “universitas” was widely used at the time of the emergence of urban town life and the medieval guilds to describe a specialized association of students and teachers with collective legal rights that were usually guaranteed by charters issued by the respective legal authorities. So it is quite clear that most definitions of a university, implicitly though often without any facts, assume that the dominant mode of delivery is the traditional lecture-based one (sometimes referred to as conventional). Note that the author defines a traditional university as the classroom and lecture-based mode of delivery with an assumption of existence of students and physical classrooms with walls and lecture theatres and that the students badly need to be lectured, short of which there will be no learning. Such an erroneous and/or outdated assumption leads one to believe that without teaching, there is no learning and that students know nothing unless they are taught or indeed spoon fed by their lecturers. Other hidden but further common assumptions includes the belief that students must study away from their homes or residences and somehow they must stay in a hostel or a secluded community. These definitions indeed assume that a
Distance Education or Distance Learning?

Prior to attempting to define a modern open and distance learning university, the author wishes to define the terms distance education as well as the term “distance learning”. Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education, referenced 5 August 2011) describes distance education or distance learning as “a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and the applicable technology with the aim of delivering teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom.” Furthermore, distance learning is also described as “a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance or both.” A critical review of the above descriptions shows two flaws in relation to the modern techniques of distance education. The first is the false idea that there is presumably only one source of learning materials and the student is the sole learner instead of both the teacher and the student learning. The second flaw emanates from the undue over-insistence on teaching in the first definition and hence painting the picture that what is delivered must be “teaching” instead of “knowledge” with a traditional belief in teacher-centred learning than any other mode of learning.

What is a Modern ODL University?

Literature (http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education, vis. 05.08.2011c), reports that in the USA, distance education dates back to at least 1728 as reported in the Boston Gazette when Caleb Phillip sought students to take weekly lessons. However, it is common knowledge that all over the world, modern distance education initially relied on either development of the postal services in the 19th century or earlier or the evolution from some form of correspondence colleges or institutes that were indeed well supported by postal services up to the colonial territories (that existed then) to the current modern ODL universities that rely on a wide range of technologies and other student-centred techniques of teaching and learning. The author takes the liberty to define a modern Open and Distance Learning delivery mode to be the student-centred mode of teaching and learning that gives the opportunity and flexibility to use traditional as well as modern communication technologies (ICTs, print media, electronic platforms, online multi-media, mobile phones, radio, TVs, Video clips, CDs, DVDs, social media, etc.) in order to assist learners to acquire knowledge at their own time and pace within the operational rules of the respective accredited institution. Hence, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can be used by both the exclusively ODL institutions or as a supplement to oral lectures in traditional universities in form of “Blended learning”. It is important to stress the necessity that for such an ODL institution to be internationally recognized, it (i.e. the institution) as well as the programmes delivered are accredited by the relevant national or regional body as specified by the applicable laws. This way, one can avoid confusing genuine ODL institutions from the many existing and mostly online and often unaccredited degree mills that even do not have a physical address.

The Critical Role of ICT Infrastructure and Services in Modern ODL Universities

In any modern ODL university, investment in sustainable ICT infrastructure and services is very crucial to ensure good service delivery in terms of being able to offer efficient services emanating from proper implementation of the institutional ICT Policy and ICT Masterplan. A modern ODL university cannot afford to live without such an investment and ought to be supported by a robust related human resources capacity that must nevertheless be retained in the long run. This will ensure that the computerized services are sustainable, reliable and students or other clients get feedback on time. With regards to access to information databases, existence of good ICT infrastructure and services will support the learners as well as the lecturers very well. Furthermore, ODL systems and facilities can be shared by several parties with ease and hence their utilization can be easily shared with other ODL as well as non-ODL institutions as for example in Cuba where public secondary schools in the past paved the way for open university studies to be conducted for free during the afternoons and evenings by public universities. Indeed ODL universities will have to ensure all their course materials are also available in both hard print format as well as in soft format on electronic platforms, DVDs, CDs, USBs or in any other form.

As demonstrated by the action plan of the African Council on Distance Education (ACDE) and specifically the ACDE-TCC, preparation of study materials can be shared amongst any interested African universities
that are ready to collaborate. This ensures maximum economies of scale and sharing of the costs by all interested parties during these times of budgetary limitations. All academic staff of such an ODL university have to be computer literate and they must be able effectively to use the electronic platforms adopted by their universities to ensure they can respond to student queries submitted for clarification. Use of a variety of multi-media technologies will also enhance student learning. Universities are encouraged to use Open Source Software (OSS) to avoid the high costs of commercial or proprietary software that are too expensive to maintain. In environments with either low bandwidth access or high costs, universities are at times forced to utilize video-conferencing facilities that work well in such conditions and hence it may be necessary to train technical staff to cope with such circumstances.

Benefits of Partnerships and Collaboration Amongst ODL Institutions

The author wishes to highlight that though university partnerships and collaborations can generally be very beneficial, the ODL mode of delivery lends itself to be very much aligned to this approach due to the immense returns that can be associated with the resulting economies of scale when ODL activities are undertaken collaboratively through such networks as ICDE, ACDE, DEASA, SCOP or indeed the many other regional and sub-regional networks that bring together a number of ODL institutions. The special feature of the ODL system that guarantees maintenance of quality education even if the numbers of students admitted increases drastically is a positive feature that makes modern ODL institutions suitable to be part of any collaborative efforts. The ODL system avoids the attendant risks of fall in quality associated with the lecture-based education attainable from traditional universities. From the experiences of the author in the traditional and ODL institutions, traditional university academicians are known to be fairly individualistic and at times, they unduly look down on ODL colleagues as well as the delivery system usually purely out of their own personal ignorance. Collaboration between ODL institutions and traditional universities as practiced by the Open University of Tanzania may be the best way of minimizing such ignorance.

Features of a Well Managed Modern ODL University

For the purposes of this paper, a well managed modern ODL university is regarded to be an institution that is recognized or aspiring to be recognized by national, regional as well as global authorities responsible for registration and accreditation of universities. University operations of such an ODL institution ought to be closely guided by ICT applications in both its management as well as the academic delivery. Such an institution should also have in place good ICT services and infrastructure as well as a guarantee of an excellent access to international bandwidth. From literature (Mbwette, 2006; Mbwette, 2008; Mbwette, 2010 & Mbwette & Kazungu, 2011), in addition to the above stated general pre-requisites, a well managed ODL university is expected to have most or all of the features of the following six systems in place to ensure it really operates efficiently:

- A Favourable and flexible legal environment that gives it the desired flexibility of operation,
- A Comprehensive set of institutional Policy and Operational Procedures that guarantee good governance and also minimize potential grey areas,
- An Efficient and Effective Planning Framework with a guaranteed Monitoring and Evaluation system at all levels,
- An up to date organisational structure of positions of such an institution that must be frequently reviewed to fit in the micro as well as the macro environment,
- A good design of the structure of the participatory organs (committees) that ought to be adjusted from time to time to be in line with the organisational structure of positions and the legal regime,
- A comprehensive quality assurance framework for all outputs that is internationally benchmarked.

Well managed modern ODL universities are often supported by a Client Service Charter (CSC) which assists in telling the clients as well as the general public, the minimum acceptable level of service to be delivered by such an ODL university. The CSC is often supported by an electronic as well as manual feedback systems to assist in judging how well the institution is doing so as to correct any areas that may need immediate or long term attention. A well managed modern ODL institution also ought to benchmark its services and operations to the proven best performers in the world in terms of actual performance and not simply from quoting the rampant rankings that nowadays seem to be undertaken by every Tom, Dick and Harry. The author believes that each region needs to establish an acceptable discipline-wise rating and not ranking framework to be coordinated by an agent of a regional body like ACDE and AAU for Africa as supervised by the AU. At global level, UNESCO should preside over the process of getting global level leaders in form of say the top ten
WHAT MAKES A WELL MANAGED MODERN ODL UNIVERSITY MUCH CLOSER TO THE ‘IDEAL UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE’?

institutions per discipline. Such a modern ODL institution has to remain constantly creative and innovative as demonstrated by some respectable ODL universities like Unisa under the leadership of the immediate past Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa Professor Barney Pityana to whom this paper is dedicated, the Open University UK and Open University of the Netherlands in Europe as well as some hybrid or traditional universities in Asia that can be regarded as excellent in teaching and learning, research and publications as well as in consultancy and public service like the University Sains Malaysia located in Penang, Malaysia.

Unpredictability of the Future

Before outlining what can be considered to be the characteristics of the ideal university of the future, it pays to briefly highlight what type of the future is being referred to in this paper. Mwapachu (2010) citing Handy (1995), contends that the ambiguity and complexity of the future can be understood well from the following quotation from Charles Handy:

“because history is long, we feel that the future too will be a long time in coming. We may be surprised------ we don’t have to wait for that future; we can shape it, but there isn’t much time. It would be sad if we missed our future because of our past”

The above statement by Handy assists to remind us that the future is likely to have many surprises and in addition, we must avoid spending too much time looking at the past when we are planning for the future. It is therefore quite apparent to most of us that the future is likely to be even more dynamic and constantly evolving at supersonic speeds. Mwapachu (ibid), has summarized the presumed dynamic and complex nature of the global future as consisting of but not limited to (updated and refined by the author):

• Wider applications of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) driven by the new and ever changing complexity and robustness,
• Intensified globalisation of the economy, finance, education and culture to mention just a few,
• Extensive use of a variety of multi-media technologies for learning and educational deliveries and opportunities as offered by I-pads, I-pods, Tablets, Blackberries e.t.c. (emphasis is mine).
• E-learning, e-governance, e-business, e-commerce and ultimately e-everything (emphasis is mine),
• Social networks of various forms (Facebook, Twitter, blogspots, YouTube, websites, video clips and various networks).

Other prominent authors who also describe the complexity of the future include Homer-Dixon, 2001 whose assessment of the economic and political achievements of the developed world explicitly points out the flaws associated with the “selective” and often “biased” approach of making rosy presentations of the successes of the West without pointing out any crucial weaknesses or risks. This is for example demonstrated by the recent riots in a number of urban localities of the UK that were somehow intentionally not predicted (despite being somehow fanned by social networks). These were preceded by the “awakening civil demonstrations” in the Arab world that were seen to have been predictable, largely because of the prominent role of social networks. Another current example is the near omnipotent global financial crisis that has beset the West in the last decade which has not been resolved to date. The respected Lebanese-American author Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007) refers to the need for the world to start “thinking about the unthinkable” or the need to start to focus our studies and research on “what we do not know about or least know”, instead of the current approach of focusing only on “what we know best” as practiced by most modern academicians. From the above short discourse, it is quite clear that an ideal university of the future will have to strategically re-position itself such that it can respond to the new and constantly changing global demands associated with the desired development aspirations and challenges leading to an overhaul of the relevance and efficacy of the historical university mission apart from preparing itself well to meet head on the complex and constantly evolving challenges associated with global socio-economy, economics, finance and trade.

What is an Ideal University of the Future?

According to Mwapachu (ibid) and other literature; in order to be able to face the many challenges at local and global levels, an ideal university of the future will have to address and/or mainstream the following seventeen features in its plans on a regular basis (as refined and re-organised by the author):

• Challenges associated with the attainment of the desired dynamic socio-economic transformation.
• Fully prepare to meet both the present and presumed or forecastable and non-forecastable future challenges.
• To fully exploit and be at the forefront in the ICT associated advances at all times.
• To embrace more deeply the Open and Distance Learning mode of delivery to promote more equitable access.
• To provide lifelong learning services continuously using modern technologies.
• To be part of the enhanced open global network set up.
• To be prepared to be subjected to highly intensive and rigorous controls to ensure quality outputs that are regionally and globally benchmarked as guided by recognized regional bodies.
• To focus more on exploitation of income generation opportunities offered by public as well as private funding sources guided by national priorities.
• To continue to be very innovative and creative.
• To produce graduates who become effective leaders in the university and the rest of the society.
• To have the ability to periodically hive-off the most successful professional and vocational programmes to be hosted by independent Institutes or Centres as exemplified by the Havard Business School or Kennedy School of Government in USA.
• Develop selected Centres of excellence in the University on a continuous basis.
• Aspire to enhance partnership and collaboration with others to ensure maximum benefit from the resulting economies of scale.
• To become a de facto incubator of new businesses and to encourage creation of spin-off firms thereby benefitting economically in the long run.
• To promote global networks in research with other reputable R&D institutions.
• To be a genuinely very entrepreneurial university that works closely with industry.
• To be more pre-occupied with solving the challenges facing the general community around it.

Therefore, a modern ODL university is expected to have most if not all of the above seventeen highlighted features to ensure its education is comparable to any other alternative delivery systems if not better than them.

SELECTED CONSTRAINTS FACING ODL UNIVERSITIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The following are some critical factors that may delay or prevent some developing country ODL universities from transforming into modern ODL universities:

• Lack or absence of political awareness as well as will from both politicians and civil servants.
• Operation in an environment with unreliable power supply and fluctuations and interruptions when available. In turn, this leads to frequent damage of the switch gears and unreliability of web based services unless solar energy back up systems are installed.
• High costs of bandwidth largely due to conflict of interest from politicians who also happen to be business people.
• Relatively high costs of computers and network accessories.
• Difficulties to negotiate and be awarded special educational rates for software and hardware that are somehow easily extended to universities from richer countries.
• The creeping energy crisis has made use of solar energy back up with battery banks almost compulsory, hence making capacity building of staff in solar energy installations and trouble-shooting necessary.
• Lack of funds needed for human resources capacity building in disciplines associated with maintenance and innovation.
• Shortage of funds for facilitating staff retention in the ICT, finance, accounting and Human Resources Management (HRM) disciplines.
• Failure to play meaningful roles at global or regional levels because of being generally substantially underfunded.

Conclusion

The paper concludes by reiterating that, indeed modern ODL institutions operate pretty close to the presumed operational framework of the ideal university of the future due to having a lot of features that are similar to the latter including the main delivery mode and the fact that they are both learner-centred rather than teacher-centred. However, it is quite clear that a traditional lecture-based university will have to undertake major shifts in its paradigm, partly due to the current over-emphasis on “teaching” as well as being too “teacher-centred”.
Dedication

This paper has been prepared in honour of Professor Barney Pityana, the immediate past Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa who has played a very active role in promoting distance education at the African continent level through the ACDE as its foundation Chairman as well as at global level as a very active member of the Executive Committee of ICDE. The author is grateful to him for his unwavering support of the ODL mode of delivery. Those of us who were still new in the trade by 2005, could always count on him whenever the ODL mode of delivery came under fire in any forum. Finally, the author wishes to thank the ICDE for giving him the opportunity to be part of the team that has authored these special papers.

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Creating an Open Educational Resources University and the Pedagogy of Discovery

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Foreword
This article was written as a tribute to Nyameko Barney Pityana, a visionary leader, theologian, lawyer, activist and custodian of human rights. Professor Pityana, a respected intellectual and scholar, restored democracy to distance learning in South Africa during his tenure as the first black Vice Chancellor of his alma mater, the University of South Africa. Professor Pityana’s considerable contribution to access and equity throughout his long and distinguished career has established firm foundations contributing to the University of South Africa’s commitment to participate in the efforts of an international higher education partnership of like-minded innovative institutions to create an Open Educational Resources university network.

Introduction
In February 2011, with the support of UNESCO, the OER Foundation hosted a meeting at Otago Polytechnic with the aim of exploring the concept of using OER for assessment and credit for students http://wikieducator.org/OER_for_Assessment_and_Credit_for_Students. The meeting in Dunedin was limited to 23 participants, but the associated live web stream sponsored by UNESCO attracted an additional 203 participants from 45 different countries. A record of the meeting is available at http://wikieducator.org/OER_university/First_meeting. The essence of the project, which now provides the framework for the Open Educational Resources university (OERu), is illustrated in Figure 1.

Sir John Daniel of the Commonwealth of Learning predicts that the OER university system will reduce the cost of higher education dramatically, particularly for learners excluded from the system (Daniel 2011). At present (August 2011) the following five institutions, referred to as anchor partners, have joined the OER Foundation in creating the OER Tertiary Education Network and have committed resources to planning the implementation of the OERu:

- Athabasca University (Canada)
- State University of New York, Empire State College (USA)
- Otago Polytechnic (New Zealand)
- University of South Africa (RSA)
- University of Southern Queensland (Australia).

What is the OERu?
The OER university http://wikieducator.org/OER_university (OERu):

- aims to widen access and reduce the cost of tertiary study for learners who are excluded from the formal education sector;
- is an international innovation partnership of accredited universities, colleges and polytechnics coordinated by the OER Foundation http://wikieducator.org/OERF:Home, an independent educational charity;
- does not confer degrees, but works in partnership with accredited educational institutions who provide assessment for academic credit on a fee-for-service basis;
- collaborates with the global WikiEducator network of educators in the formal sector for shared course development;
- is designed to cover the operational cost of institution-based OERu services on a cost-recovery basis (or alternate revenue sources).
will provide pathways for students to achieve credible credentials for approved courses based solely on open education resources (OER), that is learning materials that have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or re-purposing by others; optimises the visibility and impact of the community service mission of tertiary education institutions requiring less than 1% of institutional budget allocation of staff time and/or institutional resources.

How does the OERu work?
Individuals are free to learn from digital materials hosted on the open web. The problem is that learners who access digital OER on the web and acquire knowledge and skills either formally or informally, alone or in groups, cannot readily have their learning assessed and subsequently receive appropriate academic recognition for their efforts. OERu students will gain free access to high quality courses that are designed for independent-study using OER. OERu learners will receive student support through a global network of volunteers and peer support using social software technologies. Students can be assessed for a fee by participating institutions and earn a credible credential.

The OER university is building a sustainable OER network among accredited educational institutions which will provide free learning to learners excluded from the formal system with pathways to gain academic credit from post-secondary institutions around the world. OERu is founded on the community service and outreach missions of tertiary education providers, and develops parallel delivery systems (now possible with the open web and free content licensing of learning materials) to augment existing educational provision.

What are the recurrent operational costs?
The OERu is designed to reuse and re-purpose the growing global inventory of OERs and open access publications available for courses. From an investment-decision perspective, participation in the OERu does not require new money, but rather a reallocation of existing staff time to releasing selected course development outputs under open content licenses for the OERu network. The OERu model anticipates that no more than 1% of existing budget time would be required for release under open content licenses. The institutional costs of assessment for academic credit services are recouped on a cost-recovery basis from student fees and/or other sources. Shared infrastructure and coordination for the OERu collaboration activities are provided by the OER Foundation.
What are the benefits?

The OERu is the means by which education at all levels can be more accessible, more affordable and more efficient. For individuals, OER can facilitate access to the world’s best quality learning materials while at the same time demonstrating huge potential for lowering the cost of study through the OERu and open textbook initiatives. The OERu facilitates international thought leadership and networking for new models of financial sustainability and growth for institutions. Using OERu approaches, institutions can lower cost and save time required to produce high quality courses with untapped potential to target underserved markets and to diversify curriculum offerings especially for low enrolment courses in a cost-effective way. Governments and whole education systems can improve the return on taxpayer dollars by providing the systemic incentives to support tiered OERu services.

Through WikiEducator, one of the world’s largest and most productive educational wiki communities, participating institutions will raise their international profiles. OERu will enable institutions to fulfil their community service mission, engender meaningful participation in mainstream OER programs, and enhance the sustainability of higher education through economic development.

The OERu Logic Model

As a result of the initial planning meeting, Athabasca University, the OER Foundation, Otago Polytechnic and the University of Southern Queensland have released a report entitled *OER University: Towards a logic model and plan for action* (http://wikieducator.org/images/c/c2/Report_OERU-Final-version.pdf). The report documents the logic model (Figure 2) and associated planning framework for building the OER university.

OERu Innovation: The Open Curriculum

In preliminary, primarily online discussion among existing partners we have used the Australian context of the USQ Diploma of Arts (DART) as a potentially useful starting point: http://www.usq.edu.au/handbook/current/arts/DART.html. The DART program aims to provide students with an introduction to study in arts disciplines and programs, and to provide a basic qualification for credit transfer/exemption in other programs. In effect, the Diploma of Arts is available as an entry point for most USQ programs not subject to auditions and interview requirements. This program should appeal to those students who want to sample a range of university subjects before embarking on a more specialised degree program. The program offers substantial choice and flexibility, allowing entry to a wide range of career and study options, including transfer to other degree programs. For example, the DART provides articulation into the following USQ undergraduate
programs: Bachelor of Arts; Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Business; Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science; Bachelor of Creative Arts; Bachelor of International Studies; Bachelor of Communication; Bachelor of Social Science. In many respects, it could be regarded as a step towards a transdisciplinary foundation year.

The DART program aims to provide students with an introduction to university study by a free selection of courses from across the University and to produce diplomats who have demonstrated competencies in communication skills necessary for further academic study in appropriate discipline areas, and have acquired basic knowledge in one or more disciplines in a relevant degree program.

Upon successful completion of the DART program, diplomats will have developed:

- an awareness of the nature of study in the arts, humanities, and social sciences
- foundation knowledge, skills and competencies in at least one discipline area
- a fundamental ability to express thoughts with clarity and coherence in written and/or oral forms
- sufficient knowledge to make informed choices about possible further study.

In the broader context of OERu, anchor partners in the OERTen will each contribute a small number of courses at the foundation level. For example, with just 5 anchor partners offering 3 courses each, there will be a total of 15 courses with students able to select 8 from 15 to gain a Diploma of Arts, equivalent to the first year of a Bachelor’s degree. With more anchor partners it would of course be possible to extend the range of courses offered across disciplines to extend the transdisciplinary nature of the Diploma. Again using the Australian context as a reference point, it is feasible that in the future 10 institutions offering 3 courses across different year levels could provide students with a choice of studying 24 from 30 courses for the equivalent of a three year Bachelor’s degree in transdisciplinary studies. The structure of the open curriculum will be discussed in detail at the aforementioned forthcoming Anchor Partners Meeting in early November 2011. Associated issues of guaranteed cross credit between anchor partner institutions, and relevant national qualifications frameworks will also be on the agenda.

**OERu Innovation: The Pedagogy of Discovery**

Another key element of the OERu logic model is the development of open pedagogy. The content of each of the courses will be based solely on the use of OER. It is increasingly clear that there is a critical mass of OER that can support scholarly activities at the foundation level across a wide range of disciplines. For example, linked below are examples of the estimated 400 well established OER repositories:

- OER Commons http://www.oercommons.org is a place to find and share open educational resources
- OER Africa a growing repository driving the development and use of OERs across all education sectors http://www.oerafrica.org/healthoer/Home/FindOER/tabid/1862/Default.aspx
- OpenCourseware Consortium is a collaboration of higher education institutions and associated organizations from around the world: http://www.ocwconsortium.org/
- Connexions is a global repository hosted by Rice University: http://cnx.org/
- MERLOT is a peer-reviewed searchable collection of online learning materials: http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm
- List of free and open textbooks that may be suitable for use in community college courses: http://oerconsortium.org/discipline-specific/
- Directory of Open Access Journals over 6,000 journals with more than 3,000 searchable at the article level: http://www.doaj.org/doaj?func=expand&uilanguage=en
- EveryStockPhoto.com – Search engine that can be used to find free images on the web: http://www.everystockphoto.com/
- Incompetech is a collection of Creative Commons licensed music: http://incompetech.com/m/c/royalty-free/
- Search by Creative Commons provides a convenient way to access search engines that include CC licensed materials: http://search.creativecommons.org/
- Wikimedia Commons is a media repository for public domain and freely-licensed educational media content (images, sound and video clips): http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Now that online access to such open educational resources for individual study is virtually unlimited, and the scope for social interactivity online is huge, there are many opportunities for pedagogical innovation. Further, if we are not to render a disservice to students, we need to ensure that their “learning journey” embraces digital literacies that will enable them to participate fully in technology-rich work environments.
The **pedagogy of discovery** has been inspired by a 2009 study managed by the Director of the Caledonian Academy, Professor Allison Littlejohn and her colleagues who developed a comprehensive framework for investigating “Learning Literacies for a Digital Age” (LLiDA) http://academy.gcal.ac.uk/llida. This seminal study delineates an expanded set of literacies, including academic practices (what competent learners do) and related digital practices (what competent digitally enabled learners do). As well as focusing on the significant contribution digital technologies can make to the development by students of such learning literacies as academic practice, metacognition, information literacy, ICT literacy, media literacy, the LLiDA team also included a detailed analysis of digital practices engendering citizenship, employability, communication and collaboration skills. The project highlights the value to students of developing expertise in selecting, critically evaluating and deploying a wide range of digital resources and digital tools to support scholarship in the context of particular disciplines. Students need to learn how to use digital technologies to participate in networks thereby contributing to knowledge acquisition and creation, to present information and evidence digitally in a range of media, to manage digital rights and responsibilities, and to use digital technologies to manage their own continuing professional development. If such learning and digital literacies were systematically embedded into the curriculum and pedagogy of higher education, students would develop the necessary expertise to act as self-directed learners capable of assessing and managing their lifelong learning needs.

The **pedagogy of discovery** aims to facilitate the development of learning literacies for a digital age by placing the student at the centre of an active learning process based on the widely acknowledged work of Professor Gilly Salmon on e-moderating (http://www.atimod.com/e-moderating/contents.shtml) and the associated five stage model (http://www.atimod.com/e-moderating/5stage.shtml) for designing and managing e-tivities. The term ‘e-tivity’ was coined by Professor Salmon. It is a structured, student-centred online task that provides a framework for an e-learning activity. The e-moderator plays an important tutorial role, mentoring, encouraging and guiding student engagement. Because of the international scope and potentially huge scale of participation by large numbers of students, the pedagogy not only needs to be scalable and sustainable, but the content of courses needs to be adaptable to meet the local needs of students covering a range of diverse cultural settings. The **pedagogy of discovery** has therefore been designed to enable students to select and evaluate relevant OER content of personal interest appropriate to their needs within the intellectual framework provided by the course structure. Further, the recruitment of academic volunteers who can act as local e-moderators and who are able to contribute with cultural sensitivity to meet the needs of individual students is seen as critical to the effectiveness of the pedagogy.

In summary, the **pedagogy of discovery** provides students with direction, scaffolding and modeling, followed by practice and feedback. Learning activities then move to less structured tasks with opportunities for students to devise strategies, select content from available online resources, and use a variety of digital tools appropriate to the task and context. The **pedagogy of discovery** is based on well-designed learning activities challenging students to undertake meaningful investigations entailing the discovery, evaluation and discussion of OER in collaborative networks with staff and students, thereby engendering the digital learning literacies necessary to support self-directed lifelong learning.

### Why is the OERu significant?

Existing delivery models cannot address the growing global demand for post-secondary education. Many countries do not have the resources to build the number of conventional universities that would be required to meet the future demand for tertiary education. The OERu is nurturing the development of a sustainable and scalable OER ecosystem for the formal sector. The OER university project aims to create a parallel learning universe based solely on OER for learners excluded from the system to augment and add value to the formal education sector. These learners may choose to enrol at formal education institutions in the traditional way or participate in free learning provided through the OERu network.

The OER university network will facilitate pathways for OER learners to gain credible credentials from participating institutions who will be formally accredited institutions in their national jurisdictions. Quality assurance and institutional accreditation is the foundation stone on which this parallel learning universe is based. The OER university concept must ensure equivalence and parity of esteem for qualifications gained through the OER university network. OER resources and systems used to support the OER university are free for reuse and re-purposing in the formal sector thus contributing to improved efficiencies and greater return on investment for participating institutions.

With OER, the marginal cost of replicating digital learning materials is near zero and sharing development costs improves cost efficiencies. The OERu is designed primarily to provide more affordable access to post-secondary education for the estimated 100 million learners in the world who are qualified for a seat in tertiary
education today, but due to funding issues or lack of tertiary education provision will not be able to gain credible qualifications. The course materials based on the pedagogy of discovery and shared infrastructure of the OERu will also add value to existing tertiary education systems worldwide.

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