ZJER

ZIMBABWE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Volume 19 Number 3 November 2007

ISSN 1013-3445

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Volume 19 Number 3 November 2007

ISSN 1013–3445

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WIDE WORLD IN UGANDA, CYP IN GHANA — LESSONS TO SHARE

Olivia Adwoa Tiwaah Frimpong Kwapong
Institute of Adult Education, University of Ghana

Abstract

The focus of this study was to do a comparative study of two international distance learning programs in Africa – WIDE World in Uganda and Commonwealth Youth Program [CYP] in Ghana to find out how the two programs could impact on each other for effective implementation.

The study revealed that putting the two courses side by side there are a lot of similarities and differences that emerge for an effective comparison - Uganda and Ghana are two African countries that share similar demographics; the WIDE World and CYP programs are both distance learning programs designed for professional development and majority of the course participants are teachers. However, in addition to other factors whiles the WIDE World model harnesses the potentials of modern technology like internet for online delivery, discussions and exercises to facilitate the teaching learning process and makes the course more accessible, and adult – friendly the CYP model does not. On the other hand, the WIDE World model does not take cognizance of learners' commitment to traditional learning media [face-to-face] and how it influences their learning styles. It will be appreciable to consider reviewing the course models to respond to these concerns. The key lesson for the CYP model in Ghana is that though there might be existing infrastructural and institutional challenges, if it has been possible to use modern technology [internet] to undertake online course in Uganda, it could be possible in Ghana as well.

Introduction

Distance learning courses have been seen as a tool for making higher learning accessible to a wide range of adults most especially in Africa. There have been several international donor supported and local initiatives for professional development among which include the WIDE World and Commonwealth Youth Programs [CYP]. Implementing such initiatives come with lot of challenges which could be well addressed with success stories or case studies from countries with similar characteristics. It is against this background that recognizing its unique characteristics, this study sought to assess the WIDE World, Uganda

initiative and the CYP to see how the approaches used could inform each other and other distance learning programs as well.

Study Objectives

The primary objective of the study was to assess the mode of delivery of the two programs, how they impact on the learners' performance and find out how the lessons learnt could inform the WIDE program and impact on CYP program in Ghana and vice versa. Specific research questions included the following –

1. What are the country demographics?
2. What is the nature of the two programs?
3. What were the expectations of students for engaging in the course?
4. To what extent were these achieved?
5. What recommendations were made for improvement?
6. What lessons are there to learn?

Methodology

To respond to the above questions, a participant observation approach was used to study the two programs. That of WIDE World was just by online observation. Data was mainly gathered from accessible and available sources. Most of the information on WIDE World was accessed from course website, course modules [online], online discussions of students etc; there was no face-to-face interaction with students. Data on CYP was mainly obtained from reports, project documents, face-to-face discussions and interview with 150 students. Some information on CYP was also obtained from the Common Wealth of Learning website.

It is also worth noting that the focus is not on course content but just the mode of delivery and its impact on the participants.

Organization of the Study

The study is presented in sections. The first section presents an abstract followed by an introduction to the entire study. The second section gives a background of

Uganda and Ghana; section three presents an over view of the two distance learning programs whiles the following sections discusses the students' views about the courses which leads to the conclusion to the study.

Limitations & Differences to Observe

The following differences could contribute to gaps and differences which need to be observed

While the WIDE course which had a shorter duration of six sessions in 12 weeks [two weeks per session] had come to a complete end as at the time of writing, CYP program, being a longer duration course was still at its initial stage [2 out of 4 semesters]

The WIDE program is purely by online learning whiles CYP is purely by print mode supported with regular face – to – face sessions. Unlike the CYP, the WIDE program has a course website which makes information highly available and accessible to both participants and observers. As a result, so much information was obtained on the WIDE program as compared to the CYP.

Another difference is that whiles the CYP is fully an academic certified course leading to a diploma from University of Ghana, participants of the WIDE program do not earn a Harvard University academic certificate however the credits obtained could be used or countered for a certified program in any institution of their choice.

Country Background

Uganda

Uganda has its independence from the UK in 1962. Per capita income in 2004 is estimated to be at about US$250. The country has a total population of 24.6 million over 241.0 thousand sq km surface area. The country's firm commitment to poverty reduction, as expressed in its *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, and the World Bank's and other Development Partners' support contributed to some development results helping the country to closely reaching the *Millennium Development Goals. http://web.worldbank.org/[DA: 28/12/04]*

Though not compulsory, Education is highly regarded in Uganda. It is expressed that there are four levels of education which include primary of seven years;

lower secondary of three or four years; upper secondary of two years; and postsecondary consisting of university, teachers' colleges, or commercial training. There is cost sharing with government at the basic level, after which education is free. In 1989 primary enrollment was more than 2.5 million; secondary, 265,000. Adult literacy rate is 50 percent or more. *http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/uganda/uganda6.html*[DA: 28/12/04]

Meanwhile it is expressed that the education system suffered the effects of economic decline and political instability during the 1970s and 1980s. As a result the physical infrastructure necessary for education was lacking, and a decline in the quality of education. School maintenance standards also suffered, teachers fled the country, morale and productivity deteriorated along with real incomes, and many facilities were damaged by warfare and vandalism.

The Museveni government therefore adopted a two-phase policy- to improve efficiency and quality of education through teacher training and curriculum upgrading. Long-term goals included establishing universal primary education, extending the seven-year primary cycle to eight or nine years, and shifting the emphasis in postsecondary education from purely academic to more technical and vocational training. *http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/uganda/uganda61.html*[DA:28/12/04]

Ghana

The World Bank Group reports that Ghana was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to emerge from colonialism in 1957. The country also experienced the highest GNP on the continent before facing an economic crisis in the late 1970s. Its per capita income in 2004 is estimated to be at about US$270. The country has a total population of 20.3 million over 238.5 thousand sq km surface area.

The report adds that Ghana has also rebounded after launching one of the first and more stringent economic recovery programs in the region nearly a decade and a half ago. It is now pioneering the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) as a new way of managing the development process. ***http://web.worldbank.org/[DA: 28/12/04]***

Enrollments in the public sector include 12,225 primary schools and 6,418 junior secondary schools with the total enrollment figures of 2,216,792 and 767,303 respectively. In the private education sector, the number of pupils in private

basic schools is given as 550,423. There are 21 training colleges, 18 technical institutions, two diploma-awarding institutions and five universities serving a population of 17 million. This shows that most Ghanaians have relatively easy access to good education. In the past decade, Ghana's spending on education has been between 28 percent and 40 percent of its annual budget.

There is free Universal Basic Education [fCUBE]. Under educational reforms implemented in 1987, after a six-year primary education, students go through a junior secondary school system for three years of academic training combined with technical and vocational training. Entrance to universities is by examination following completion of senior secondary school. School enrollment is given as almost 2 million: 1.3 million primary; 107,600 secondary; 489,000 middle; 21,280 technical; 11,300 teacher training; and 5,600 university. *http:// www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/education/index.html* [DA: 28/12/04]

The Ghana Government is determined to adopt a holistic approach to the development of education within the framework of mobilizing all available resources - human, material and financial which is gradually yielding positive results. Poverty, which has been identified as a major barrier to education, is being addressed through the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, (GPRS) which seeks to provide an enabling environment that empower all Ghanaians to participate in wealth creation.

Ghana, in spite of severe economic constraints seeks to continue to remain committed to efforts aimed at putting in place an efficient, credible and sustainable education system that will make the nation competitive in today's globalised economy which is increasingly becoming knowledge-driven. *http:// www.ghana.gov.gh/studying/education/index.php* [DA: 28/12/04]

It can be observed from the country backgrounds that Ghana and Uganda are not only African countries, but they have similar population size, per capita income and most importantly going through vigorous educational reforms to ensure quality education for the citizenly which is more useful for this study.

Overview of WIDE World and CYP

WIDE World

WIDE World [Wide-scale Interactive Development for Educators] is a distance learning program by the Harvard Graduate School of Education that seeks to –

Reach a large number of educators who would like to explore and apply research-based models in their classrooms.

Enable groups of educators from around the world to share ideas and develop reflective practical action plans for their classrooms.

Maintain intimate, personalized interaction on wide-scale with coaches, and

- Develop practical curriculum and tools for immediate use in the classroom

The program began as a pilot in 1999 and became a full enterprise by Fall 2000. It offers courses focused on Instructional Strategies, courses for Math teachers, a mini-course focused on Differentiated Instruction and a Technology Integration Program of Study. To date, it has worked with more than 2,000 teachers throughout the world including Africa to improve teaching practice and student performance.

Courses

The WIDE course on Teaching to Standards with new Technologies for professionals in Uganda for Fall 2004 sought to address the following questions:

- How can we design curriculum that develops student understanding of key curriculum standards?
- How can we integrate new technologies to enhance teaching and learning for understanding?
- How can we actively learn in an online professional community?

WIDE World's courses and tools support educators' professional development through *Design; Experimentation; Reflection*; and *Participation in Learning Communities.*

WIDE sees educators as life-long learners who need to make continual, strategic decisions to shape their professional growth. Its courses are therefore designed to do the following:

- create contexts for regular participation in communities of learning
- model ways to experiment with and use professional resources

- provide opportunities for participants to experiment with new ideas
- support participants in developing habits of reflecting regularly in varied ways

WIDE courses draw from a variety of discussion tools, reflection and assessment protocols, multimedia (e.g., video, photographs), and other tools and features that exploit the online environment so that it supports design, experimentation, reflection, and learning in a community. They also complement learning in face-to-face communities and model learning practices that suggest how to design effective learning groups in schools. The courses take place in an online environment called "course platform". Students are assigned to an online "study group" which "meets" in the online discussion area each session to share ideas, drafts of work and other assignments, reflections, and responses.

WIDE's Team-based enrollment approach facilitates site-based, face-to-face learning context for online course participants from the same school, district or other institution. *The Instructor* writes and/or manages Session Notes; reflects on and synthesizes content from past sessions; responds to participants' questions and comments; and manages and supports course coaches. *The coach* is the main WIDE contact throughout the course. He or she participates by responding in the Discussion, assignments and projects and help with logistical needs as well. The *Course Participants* are expected to actively and regularly engage in all course activities and respond to all assignments and tasks appropriately.

Assessment for Certification

The course duration is about 12 weeks with six sessions [two weeks for a session]. Each assignment in the course has a value, typically between 3 - 4 hours. The value is the estimated time, in hours, to complete the assignment. Participants who complete 35 hours (or points) worth of assigned work, out of a possible 42, are awarded a digital course certificate. Students who do not complete all of the assignments are given partial credit.

The course is not offered for Harvard University graduate credit. However, for those who have arranged to take this course for graduate credit through a local university, WIDE could issue a letter of participation that states the course title, a brief course description, and the number of hours completed by the participant.

Commonwealth Youth Program [CYP]

CYP is an international development agency that works to give young people aged 15-29 the skills, confidence and avenues to create a better future for themselves and for their families and communities.

They work directly with member governments and young people on a range of political, social and economic issues. They also develop partnerships with local, regional and international agencies to strengthen youth involvement at all levels. CYP was established by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1973. It aims to work towards a society where young men and women are empowered to develop their potential, creativity and skills as productive and dynamic members of their societies and participate fully at every level of decision-making and development, both individually and collectively, promoting Commonwealth values of international co-operation.

CYP has been focusing on these four strategic programme areas:

- Youth Enterprise Development
- Youth Networks and Governance
- Youth Participation
- Youth Work Education and Training

Through these programme areas, CYP:

- Provides skills, resources and contacts for young people to create their own business ventures.
- Strengthens youth networks so that they serve young people more effectively. Develops youth work as a profession.
- Works with governments to make young people active citizens, who have a say in how their countries are run.
- Shares experiences, results and best practices in youth development across countries and regions.

- Provides skills in information and communication technology (ICT) for young people. Builds youth leadership.
- Helps young people play a greater part in economic and social development.

CYP Diploma in Youth in Development Work

The course seeks to prepare professional youth development workers in over 40 countries of the Commonwealth. It is designed to provide workers with an underpinning knowledge on which to base work with young people, an understanding of the values and ethics of the profession, grounded in the values and principles of the Commonwealth and the practical skills to undertake the work.

Thus the program is aimed at the creation, maintenance, and development of youth work as a profession and as an academic field of study. It is offered by 15 Partner Institutions and nine Partner Support Institutions who teach the course accredited by the partner institutions. [*http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Templates/CYPInternal.asp?NodeID=38416 28/12/2004*]

In Ghana, the program is being run in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat [Youth and Gender Affairs Division], Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports Ghana; and the University of Ghana. The program runs 14 modules for four semesters [two academic years].

Course Content

The 14 modules include Commonwealth Values in Youth in Development Work; Young People and Society; Principles and Practice of Youth in Development Work; Working with Young People in their Communities; Gender and Development; Learning Processes; Management Skills; Project Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation; Policy, Planning and Implementation; Conflict Resolution Strategies and Skills; Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development; Youth and Health; Sustainable Development and Environmental Issues; Introduction to Methodology in Social Investigation; and a final Project Work.

Course Delivery and Assessment

The course is a purely distance learning program supported with regular face-to-face sessions. The course opens with a-two-day face-to-face orientation

program to introduce students to the University of Ghana system and the entire course. They are also given tips on how to study at a distance. This gives students the opportunity to get responses to their questions and interact with their fellow students, some of the tutors and course staff.

For evaluation, students are required to present two assignments per module and write an end semester examinations which covers the modules for the period. All assignments are presented in hard copy, either by post or in person. Due to unreliability of the Ghana Post, most students prefer to submit their assignments in person. Apart from the usual face-to-face sessions which are held in the regional capitals, all examinations are written at one centre, the University of Ghana campus. To qualify for a diploma certificate students are expected to pass all the end of semester examinations in addition to the project work.

Students' Views

WIDE World: Outlining Learning Objectives

The course opened with an orientation program that gave opportunity for learners to share their goals and artifacts that best describe themselves and views. Expectations that participants outlined ranged from acquisitions of technology oriented skill to be able to improve their teaching/learning activities to sharing of experiences with colleagues. Some participants also desired to experience online learning. This implies that remarkable of adult learners and professionals, the participants knew exactly what they expected to learn in the course, which will contribute to make it a purposeful enterprise. This orientation exercise also gave the participants opportunity to be part of the implementation if not the designing process. This adult-learning approach to designing online learning will no doubt go to enrich the program, motivate the learners, enhance participation and eventually lead to a higher level of success. [Rudestam & Scoenholtz-Read; Fontaine, Gary; Shapiro & Hughes, 2002]. Feedback from participants during the course evaluation session will be analyzed to assess the extent to which these goals were achieved. Some of the goal statements by participants include the following:

Box 1: Participants' Goals

To Enhance Teaching and Learning Skills

- *to acquire more skills and knowledge to improve on my methods of teaching; integrating technology into teaching for a better understanding of the learners;*
- *to acquire more technology skills and methodology, which I can use to create a focused and student-centered learning environment to, used in my training; acquire knowledge and skills of integrating technology with the existing learning/teaching environment in the rural set up;*
- *to share best practices and skills of Appropriate Technology Vs Traditional Learning/ teaching methods in the classroom;*
- *to acquire skills and motivation to teach big groups of students practically; learn how to motivate my students take responsibility for their own learning; share with my course mates the techniques we could use in teaching big student groups skills of living;*
- *to acquire new skills and share new ideas of how I can impact mathematics concepts to my student teachers using the new technology so that they also do the same to their pupils to lift the standards of learning in our country;*
- *to develop new techniques and methods of lesson presentation that will enable students research and discover knowledge and skills on their own;*
- *employ technology to enhance students' holistic development, through multimedia, this multimedia approach to teaching and learning can allow students to learn through their different learning styles and also cater for multiple intelligences; and to become an expert instructor through discussion with other group members*

To Have Opportunity to Share and Interact With Others

- *to have a wider scope of interaction with other tutors in the field of mathematics education;*
- *to widen the scope of interaction with tutors, learners from other schools and colleges*
- *to widen the scope of interaction between tutor and fellow tutors, tutor and learners, and coaches*

To Improve/ develop Skills in Technology and Online Learning

- *to experience collaboration [e and advance knowledge*
- *to interact worldwide on teaching methodology and technology;*

To Participate Effectively in the Course Processes and Activities

- *to read, understand and respond to all the posted materials weekly for the whole course session;*
- *to interact, discuss and learn from my instructors, coaches and discussion groups on matters relating to this course every week for the whole course session;*
- *to read, understand and apply curriculum design and development from this course;*
- *to create learning networks both locally and globally as expected of this course;*

Other[s]

- *to save the environment through carrying environmental education.*

Assessing Impacts

With the above objectives outlined, participants went through a six-session module online course which was interspersed with introduction to the modules, online discussions, group work and interactions at online cafes. To capture the views and impressions of participants after the course, the final session was for *Reflections and Farewells – SelfAssessing*. Based on the high level of interactions that participants had had throughout the course, they were able to express themselves to show the extent to which the course had impacted on them and were full of praise for the course. They outlined the knowledge and skills they had acquired, how it had impacted on their teaching and learning and what they planned to do next. A critical study of their responses will show that they had seen the need for integrating technology in their teaching, treat their students as part of the designing and delivery process and not just recipients of knowledge; and change their student assessment approach. They saw that the traditional methods of teaching – basing strictly on textbooks, following the curriculum, not involving students in the outlining of learning goals and teaching, and using a fixed examination criteria to assess them was not a good approach. After the course they indicated that they had changed their approach to drawing their lesson plans and encourage their students to search for more resources from the internet. Another remarkable achievement was how their computer literacy skills had improved. They had learnt how to use goggle to search for information.

With these clear impacts, participants promised to apply the skills in their teaching enterprise.

Some of the expressions by course participants have been presented below.

Box 2: Participants' Success Stories

I plan to connect this learning to my work in the future by changing from my traditional way of using text books as a major source of resources for students' learning to the modern system of using technologies. Technology integration will enable me use a participatory teaching approach for students' understanding.

I have also gained the concept that a teacher should not consider himself the only source of knowledge but students and use of New Technology can be reliable tributaries of knowledge that can be depended upon.

Involving learning groups in identifying technologies they are to use in accomplishing their group tasks will always go a long way in inducing them to change for the better. Because I like it, because it has a way of relieving my work, because it is interesting, because it increases the teacher/Learner relation, I shall endeavor to practice it, and it shall succeed.

The Teaching for Understanding Framework has proved very useful. It systematically helped to develop a lesson, to teach and how to teach it. The framework helps one articulate clear steps involved in planning and teaching, possible technology media that can be used. The framework gets your thinking, I was helped to be more organized to achieve the objective namely understanding. I have learnt to bring together the ingredients necessary for understanding.

Yes I can now say with confidence that I will apply what I have learnt to other topics to improve understanding of my lessons. A lot of changes in terms of enrichments took place from the initial lesson plan I posted in session one.

The elements which help the understanding process are better articulated in the CCDT Design. Well coordinated and can help me see the whole picture as to standards set for teaching a subject matter namely the national standards, and goals and objectives I have to set to achieve them and how they relate to each other. I have learnt a systematic approach to teaching for understanding using the Teaching for Understanding Framework.

When I look at my original lesson plan, it completely encourages cram work and has nothing to do with students' understanding. It was based on passing exams and that is it. It had little to do with students' involvement and does not even mention about the assessment criteria to be used during the lesson thus it is more of teacher-centered than student centered. It only mentions about the objectives but it is not specific to what I want my students to understand at the end of the lesson.

The plan that [name removed] and I put in place was very different from the one we submitted in Session One. It has transformed from the very basic theoretical way of teaching Algebra where the teacher was the soul source of knowledge to a very rewarding student centered lesson that makes understanding better through use of technologies like power point, e-portfolios to mention but a few. Most of all, I am very happy that the design changed to include assessment that is straight forward and has criteria.

The Feeling of Sense of Community

One remarkable thing about the course was the feeling of a sense of community. Though participants interacted online, they had a high level of interaction within the few weeks that they were on the program and the participants were impressed about it. This indicates that there is the possibility of developing a high sense of community and presence in an online learning environment. This confirms the statement of Fontaine, Gary [2002:47] that "the sense of presence thus may well surpass that achieved in synchronous ecologies, which rely so significantly on the image quality and transparency of the support technology... *our minds are still better than our monitors*" the statements below shows how well participants interacted among themselves.

Box 3: Expressions of Sense of Community

I cannot find the right words to express how exciting the last weeks have been. I have connected with online friends and met very many interesting educators. I enjoyed having the cup of coffee in the tech café and my colleague [name removed] was amazing to work with.

When one has been enjoying the course it is indeed with mixed feelings that one ends it. Because we want to end and get our certificates; on the other hand we want to continue talking to one another. Please, can we do both! i.e. get our certificates and continue to learn together.

As [name removed] I have acquired a life long life skill of "Knowing and living with others. "Can you imagine sharing an international joke with friends you have never dreamt of in life. What about the experiences, advice, and feedback. The technological friendship formation in the groups and teams, feedback colleagues has taught me much about interpersonal relationships.

Colleagues and coaches, it has been a great pleasure sharing experience with you. Thanks for the ideas you have shared. They have definitely been a great inspiration to my career advancement. I have not remained the same, since I joined the discourse with you, educators. I have added more to my understanding of technology in teaching. Keep in practice with new technologies amidst all difficulties. I miss you all.

Colleagues, we have vivid memories of your ideas, contributions, and insights. It has been great meeting you all in the Technology café and some of you in the CCDT. We wish we could have an Oliver Twist!

For sure I am going to miss this course. I have been used to the ongoing interaction between both my coaches, instructors and colleagues. The collaborations I have had with my coaches will go on between I and my students/pupils. I thank everybody for the participation they have undertaken. ...

'Saying good-bye is a great sorrow
To you who are so dear to us'.
Best wishes dear participants.

Coaches

There is no doubt that the coaches played a key role in helping students to achieve this high sense of community.

The coaches were just always there for the participants, they gave quick responses to their issues, they were encouraging, motivating, reshaping their ideas, encouraging them to make progress, and improve.

The instructional language used was also highly interactive and refreshing and adult friendly – eg: "have fun" remarked at the end of guidelines for reflective exercise made the sessions very relaxing, thus making students feel relaxed as they went about their academic activities. This is how participants saw their coaches:

Box 4: Participants Expression about the Coaches

I appreciate the role played by my coach and feed back colleagues and all who supported me during this course.

It's hard for me to express how grateful I am to you for the guidance, coaching, teaching and the attitude you had for me to benefit from this course right from the beginning. At first, I was scared, frightened and pessimistic about the program. The idea that I should prepare a lesson plan was far from a reality but you comforted me and did all it took you to keep me going. Thank you very much!

My colleague and I feel heavily indebted to our coaches and all of you for making this course an enriching and exciting experience. We are immensely inspired and challenged to make the TfU framework part and parcel of our academic and professional lives. We cherish the knowledge, skills and values we have shared and acquired and look forward to accessing more educative and collaborative ways and exposure as we strive to better our practices in teaching and learning.

Challenges

Participants anticipated a number of challenges especially if they sought to implement and apply the skills they had acquired.

Infrastructure & Technology

There appeared to be infrastructural and communication technology challenges. Constant power supply was the concern of most participants. They expressed inadequate power supply to run most of the devices such as computers and LCD Projectors.

One other key challenge that almost every participant expressed was the issue of access to technology - getting computers and its accessories for use and regular access to the internet. Some claimed to have experienced poor connectivity at their workplaces whiles they were on the course. As a solution to this some of them reported to have informed their administrative heads about the course and the need to make budgetary allocations to purchase such equipments for the schools.

Some also felt that availability of computer laboratories in all schools could make it more convenient for teachers to integrate technology in their lessons. To overcome this challenge, this statement by a participants could be very helpful *"In the mean time I intend to start small with just the minimum I have of the technology, apply the resources I have acquired in this course. As I work towards more usage of new technologies"*

Financial Resources

Typical of African countries the issue of financial constraints came up. Those who used commercial internet services in town felt they should have been given a token to pay for those services. Some even feel it will be difficult to maintain the computer laboratory. To this participants were of the view that, Government will need to commit itself to provision of the needed facilities for effective application of the skills acquired in all schools.

Administrative Support/ Traditional Methods of Teaching and Assessment/ Institutional Practices

According to Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read [2002:3] *"Changing the university is like changing the cemetery. You don't get help from the inhabitants"* Similarly,

participants noted lack of support and commitment from the district as little is known about the importance of technology application in the field of education. There is already a fixed National Education Examination system coupled with examination driven syllabus, hence changing to new systems of assessing students could be difficult. This appears to be a policy issue and will have to be addressed from that end. Hence a participant remarked that, *if change will occur, it will definitely have to be gradual.*

Human Resource

Much as they had been trained, some participants felt there was still the problem of inadequate trained personnel who will be willing to adapt to the practice of integrating *New Technology* to teaching. Some also felt that in case they were transferred, their current school may not benefit from these new skills any more. To address this issue, some felt the need to impact the skills and knowledge to more people for a stronger collaborative effort.

Problem of Large Class Size

Participants indicated that there is ever increasing and unpredictable student population that is not properly planned to fit the available infrastructure. Thus there is large number of students as opposed to limited computers and other facilities in the laboratory

The Face-to-Face Syndrome

As usual of online learning and the commitment to face-to-face, a participant felt they should have had more opportunity to interact face-to-face. With this missing, the participant expressed this feeling *"it was very difficult to meet in order to share views about the course so the principle of "every one for himself and God for us all" was the only prevalent guidance".*

Computer Literacy Skills/Fear of Technology Use

Limited literacy skills for some participants and their students came up as an issue for those who had little knowledge and skills in handling the tools. Some also observed lack of confidence and mastery over technology use. However their ability to go through the course successfully proved their capability.

Resistance to Change

To some participants, resistance by some teachers to change and/or adapt change in use of New Technology could affect progress and application of the acquired skills

Urban/Rural Divide

A crucial issue that came up was how these skills could be used in rural communities where electricity and access to the internet may be limited. All these add to increase the gap between the rural and urban communities. Could there be a solar powered, wireless or handheld device that could be suitable for such areas?

Commonwealth Youth Program [CYP]: Students' Observations

Students' Reasons for Pursuing the CYP Program

The students, over 70% of whom are teachers gave their reasons for pursuing the course to include promotion and professional upgrading, raise academic standards, acquire more skills in dealing with the youth, acquire skills for social work and community development, and for some just to get a certificate.

Why Study at a Distance?

Students, most especially adult learners have crucial reasons for pursuing courses at a distance. In responding to their pre-course evaluation, the distance learners outlined these as their reasons for pursuing their further studies at a distance – about 60% of the 150 respondents said it is due to lack of study leave facility at their workplaces, others gave these reasons – lack of financial and other resources to stay on campus, problems with accommodation on campus, commitment to family responsibilities, the convenience for adults with family responsibilities, opportunity to keep engaged in communal activities and pursue other activities and to be able to work whiles studying.

For the women, distance learning is a more special approach that gives them an opportunity to engage in further studies to upgrade themselves whiles maintaining jobs, domestic and social roles like nursing, home management etc.

Application of Skills

Students planned to use their skills and knowledge to help educate and improve their communities, improvement of youth organizations, rural development, community guidance and counseling, effective church ministry, and promotion at workplace.

Suggestions for Improvement

Students have made the following recommendations for improving the course to make it more convenient and adult-leaner-friendly.

Course Design and Delivery

A first recommendation by students is the request for the opportunity to make an input in the planning and delivery of the course. For instance a student remarked that *"the adult no matter his/her background has an amount of knowledge in youth development, the module should allow to input experiences and also give case studies related to the Ghanaian environment"*

Face-to-face

Probably because the students are adults with social and occupational responsibilities, some of them called for a reduction of the number of face-to-face sessions to just one in a semester. This shows that students are seeing the potential in distance learning and harnessing it for their personal development. Probably this also point to the fact that some students are appreciating the need for the adult learners to be independent and take responsibility for one's own learning than being teacher-dependent.

Resources

Unlike the WIDE program which provides a lot of resources online in addition to the TFU [Teaching for Understanding] module, the main resources that the CYP students have is the course module and probably any other material that they could obtain from the library or provided by a tutor. They therefore requested for access to more study materials, textbooks and handouts to enhance their studies and most especially write their assignments well, such that they might not even be compelled to attend the face-to-face sessions.

Technology/Internet Use

Being exposed to the internet and how it could be used to facilitate adult learning, some students proposed that online learning should be used to compliment their studies. As some participants categorically stated *"courses should be taught on the internet; websites should be created to enable students interact frequently through easy means"*

Recommendations and Lessons to Share

Several issues emerge from the students' feedback that could inform the two programmes.

In his paper on *'Planning for "Neomillennial" Learning Styles: Implications for Investments in Technology and Faculty'* Chris Dede [2004:1] observes that

"The evolution of higher education is shaped by changes in the characteristics of entering students, by development of new methods of teaching and learning, and by shifts in the knowledge that society values. ... Higher education institutions can prosper by basing their strategic investments on using these emerging educational technologies to match the increasingly "neomillennial" learning styles of their students"

This appears to be the underlying principle of the issues that emerged from the reactions of especially the CYP students who desire innovative methods of approaching the teaching-learning enterprise. The key concerns of the students could be discussed as follows:

Learner – Centered Approach

The WIDE course is designed to create more room for students input and total participation in the processes. In the CYP program students expressed the concern of getting the opportunity to be part of the course design and delivery. Since adults, according to Malcolm Knowles [1980] are known to enter into any learning community with a repertoire of knowledge, such an opportunity will no doubt be helpful in motivating and making the students more committed to the course. In her paper on *'New Design for Connected Teaching and Learning'*, Margaret Riel [2000] explains that one of the four dimensions for enhancing effective teaching-learning environment is making it *Learner-centered*, because

according to her we need to engage learners with their own goals and a willingness to construct new knowledge. She adds that learning is a basic human function; however, it is very difficult to teach something to someone who does not want to learn. Without student interest, learning proceeds at a very slow pace, if at all. She describes that *learner-centered* implies that the learner is actively engaged in the process of knowledge construction; learning is an active, exciting process that can be difficult, frustrating, and challenging but is not inherently boring; boredom sets in when learning is reduced to repetitive actions or assignments that are disconnected from larger goals or contexts. Chris Dede 2004] also talk about *Co-Design* – that is developing learning experiences students can personalize; and *Co-Instruction* as utilizing knowledge sharing among students as a major source of content. The implication here is that like the Wide World approach where students were ushered into the course by setting their own goals, such initiative will be highly appreciated by the CYP students. And the caution is that in such approaches and processes, one should not just be asking students to set their goals, but the goals should be factored into the course design as well. This means that the learner should be actively engaged in the *process of knowledge construction not just at the delivery level.* [*http://www.gse.uci.edu/mriel/whitepaper/learning.html* DA: 11/12/04]

Blending the Media

Much as the feedback of the WIDE World students generally showed that most of them were comfortable with the distributed learning approaches and some of the CYP students also expressed the desire for more technology mediated activities, others were not and desired for some amount of face-to-face especially in the case of WIDE World. This concern need to be given some consideration. In explaining 'Distributed Learning' Dede [2004:2] notes that it is a "term used to describe educational experiences that are distributed across a variety of geographic settings, across time, and across various interactive media". He adds that professional development via distributed learning involves an orchestrated mixture of face-to-face and virtual interactions, often centered on a "learning communities" model; and research according to Dede [2004] shows that, in general, the integration of interactive media into student instruction or teacher professional development profoundly shapes the learning experiences of those involved. In another paper on *Planning for "Neomillennial" Learning Styles: Implications for Investments in Technology and Faculty* Chris Dede [2004] explains that seeing computers and telecommunications as a single medium that fosters a particular approach to learning is an oversimplification of the generational frameworks for learning styles. The internet is an infrastructure

that supports many media, like "groupware" for virtual collaboration, asynchronous threaded discussions, experiential websites for informal learning, multi-user virtual environments, videoconferencing, and mobile, location-aware wireless devices (e.g., personal digital assistants with embedded global positioning system [GPS] capabilities). He further explains that research indicates that each of these media, when designed for education, fosters particular types of interactions that enable – and undercut – various learning styles. University students have a wide range of preferences among Internet-based instructional media, depending on their individual learning style. Year after year, face-to-face interactions are ranked by all students in either first or second place. This replicates the results of many distance education studies that show students often feel that something important to their learning is missing when all interactions are mediated, whether asynchronous or synchronous. The lesson here is that a single mode of delivery is not enough for adult learners who might have been fixated to the traditional mode of delivery and might have to be gradually exposed to emerging trends.

Course Website and Resources

The WIDE World program being an online course has its well designed website with its students' discussion forum, sessions and cafes' for students to interact as they wish. Some of the students in the CYP program who may probably be exposed to online learning and knowing the potentials and the convenience in it proposed for a course website. Considering the level of technological advancement, the CYP program will have to consider this seriously to make it more adult-friendly.

In addition, unlike the WIDE World program which links students to more online resources in addition to the course module, all the resources that the CYP students have to pursue their course is the course module supplemented with some material from tutors and the library. This, the students saw as inadequate for them to do their assignments and write their examinations. They desire for more reading materials to be able to get a wide range of exposure in youth work.

Coaching

Chris Dede [2004] notes that emerging devices, tools, media, and virtual environments offer opportunities for creating new types of learning communities for students and teachers. Gary Fontain [2002] also shares the view that the role

of the teacher should be seen more as facilitators. Chris Dede [2004] explains 'Learning communities' as a model of classroom instruction and teacher professional development that enables a shift from the traditional transfer and assimilation of information to the creation, sharing, and mastery of knowledge. These concepts highly prevailed in the WIDE program. Even on a teleland the WIDE students were so much impressed about the role of the coaches in facilitating a high level of interaction to make the course more adult-friendly. Students on the CYP program seamed to appreciate a better student-tutor relationship with their coaches. A better student-tutor and student-student relationship will therefore have to be enhanced to make the course more convenient for the adult learners.

Conclusion

Putting the two courses side by side there are a lot of similarities and differences that emerge for an effective comparison. Uganda and Ghana are two African countries that share similar demographics; the WIDE World and CYP programs are both distance learning programs designed for professional development and majority of the course participants are teachers. Meanwhile in addition to other factors whiles WIDE World model harnesses the potentials of modern technology like internet for online delivery, discussions and exercises to facilitate the teaching learning process and makes the course more accessible, adult – friendly and convenient the CYP model does not. On the other hand, though the WIDE World model manages to harness the potentials in distributed learning using modern technology, the program does not take cognizance of learners' commitment to traditional learning media [face-to-face] and how it influences their learning styles. It will be appreciable to review the course models to respond to these and other concerns. The key lesson for CYP in Ghana is that though there might be existing infrastructural and institutional challenges, if it has been possible to use modern technology [internet] to undertake online course in Uganda, it could be possible in Ghana as well.

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