Boundary Jumpers: A Multi-dimensional Approach to Learning

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We are all boundary jumpers—moving in and out of charted and uncharted territory as we attempt to achieve our goals. We place our feet on different terrain at different times as we seek the best way forward. We operate at the fringes of our organisations, we push the limits of bureaucracy, we challenge prevailing notions of education and learning, we struggle against the existing policy frameworks and procedures, and we seek new approaches and innovative solutions. We are adult educators, we are community activists, we are development communication specialists, we are experts in open and distance learning—we are the vanguard for change and reform.

The incredible convergence and commonality of purpose among the many dimensions of formal and nonformal education has increasingly required all of us to develop a much more diverse set of knowledge and skills across a wide range of theoretical frameworks. It is necessary that we draw upon the best practices of these varied fields in order to achieve our ultimate objective: that of providing education and learning experiences that will enrich the quality of life of those we serve.

This presentation will focus on two experiences that illustrate these points. The first will be a report on the findings and conclusions drawn from a three-year research study by the Commonwealth of Learning on distance learning in non-formal education. The second experience is a work in progress: to create a permanent facility serving Southern and Eastern Africa to strengthen and improve capacities for open and distance learning in the region. The Multichannel Learning Base (MCLB) initiative will foster regional collaboration in such areas as research, policy issues, development of methodologies and best practices, materials development, use of information and communication technologies, professional development, and exchange of information and experiences. A multichannel approach to learning relies on a variety of community resources, a number of channels of communication, and increased learner control; it promotes relevant learning experiences. Clearly, there are many lessons to be learned and challenges ahead as we continue to strive to find the “right” combination of approaches and techniques from among all the options available to us as professionals in the field of learning and education.

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