

BOOK REVIEW

Innovative Models and Practices in Teacher Development: Case Studies from the Commonwealth

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Introduction: The Broader Context

Teacher development has rarely been tested as severely as it was during the Covid years. The sudden and unpredictable disruption of schooling placed unprecedented demands on teachers, who had to adapt rapidly to unfamiliar technologies, shifting pedagogical expectations, and learners dispersed across a range of digital and non-digital environments. This was particularly evident in Commonwealth countries, where pre-existing disparities in access, infrastructure, and training exacerbated educators' challenges. In these contexts, empowering teachers became an urgent priority, not only to sustain academic continuity but also to support the millions of children abruptly displaced from their normal educational environments. The situation called for an accelerated yet efficient system of professional development — one capable of equipping teachers with practical strategies, flexible tools, and peer support networks in the face of extreme uncertainty. Traditional workshop-driven models proved inadequate, prompting the emergence of more innovative, collaborative, and context-responsive approaches to teacher learning. It is against this backdrop that this book positions itself, offering both a timely reminder of the extraordinary pressures of the pandemic and a highly readable guide to the creative practices and models of teacher development that emerged in response in resource-strained contexts. The authors, studying and working in such contexts, present cases of homegrown, frugal, innovative practices, showcasing the adage that where there is a will, there is a way. They have aptly leveraged resources provided by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and open educational resources (OER).

Innovation in Teacher Development: Key Themes and Arguments

The book presents a comparative, practice-based examination of how open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) was mobilised across diverse global contexts to sustain teacher education during periods of crisis and systemic disruption. Drawing on case studies from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, it shows how Covid-19, alongside recurring health, environmental and structural challenges, accelerated digital transformation, stimulated innovation in professional development and strengthened collaboration among national and transnational actors, particularly the COL and UNESCO.

The early chapters focus on crisis-responsive systems, highlighting the rapid activation of resource-mobilisation networks using online repositories, social media, MOOCs and Communities of Practice. Flexibility and frugal innovation emerge as central features, with learning resources adapted to local contexts, including radio-based delivery. Subsequent chapters



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demonstrate how teachers were supported in transitioning to digital modes of teaching through coordinated partnerships and participatory professional development initiatives.

The volume also offers a nuanced treatment of contexts where Covid-19 was not an unprecedented disruption, illustrating how education systems affected by recurrent crises had developed adaptive mechanisms grounded in OER, microlearning and school-based professional learning. Later chapters explore inclusive education, digital literacy, environmental education and support for out-of-school learners, emphasising community engagement and collaborative learning.

The final chapters address cultural shifts in teacher education, including online assessment, self-paced learning, and fully online teacher education programmes. Throughout the volume, teacher empowerment, sound instructional design, and stakeholder engagement emerge as unifying themes. Overall, the book positions open, flexible and well-designed learning as central to building resilient, equitable and future-ready teacher education systems.

Significant Contributions to this Area of Ideas

Collectively, the chapters make a coherent contribution by advancing a scholarly and practice-based understanding of teacher empowerment through open, distance, and flexible learning (ODFL) in contexts of disruption and systemic change. Drawing on diverse geographical and socio-economic settings, the volume provides empirical evidence of how crises — particularly Covid-19, alongside recurrent public health and structural challenges — acted as catalysts for accelerated digitalisation, pedagogical innovation and institutional transformation in teacher education. Across the case studies, the COL, often working with UNESCO and national agencies, emerges as a key actor in mobilising OER, MOOCs, microlearning and Communities of Practice to support contextually responsive professional development. Academically, the book extends theory in ODFL and networked learning by demonstrating how flexible, multimodal and frugal strategies can sustain education under extreme conditions, while foregrounding teacher agency, collaboration and leadership. Overall, the volume moves beyond emergency response narratives to offer transferable, policy-relevant insights for building resilient, equitable and future-ready teacher education systems.

Positioning Within the Existing Literature

This book contributes to and extends a growing body of scholarship on ODFL, teacher professional development, and education in emergencies. Similar publications include edited collections and reports such as *Education in emergencies and protracted crises* (UNESCO), *Teacher professional development in the digital age* (OECD), and COL-led publications on OER and MOOCs, for instance, *Policies, pedagogies and technologies to complement MOOCs for teacher professional development* (COL), in the Global South. These publications collectively analyse the potential of digital and open approaches to widen access, support resilience, and enhance professional learning during periods of disruption.

In contrast with a large proportion of the existing literature, which remains predominantly conceptual or policy-driven, or is confined to single-country analyses, this book distinguishes itself by offering multi-country, practice-based case studies that span Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, and the Pacific, and by situating Covid-19 within broader and, in some contexts, recurrent crises (e.g., pandemics, environmental challenges, teacher shortages). As such, it contributes to a more longitudinal and contextualised understanding of educational disruption and adaptation.

Fit with Related Studies and Theoretical Contributions

The book strongly aligns with research on networked learning, Communities of Practice, microlearning, and frugal innovation, while also operationalising established instructional design frameworks, such as ADDIE, and the principles of sound online course design. It supplements studies that argue for teacher agency and collaborative professional learning, and extends them by demonstrating how these principles are enacted in low-resource, crisis-prone contexts through open and flexible modalities. A key contribution is the incorporation of contexts where Covid-19 did not constitute an unprecedented disruption (e.g., Sierra Leone). The book challenges existing crises of narratives and resonates with emerging scholarship that conceptualises resilience not as a reactive response, but as an embedded and cultivated property of education systems.

Value Add, Impact and Potential Avenues for Future Study

The key value of this publication lies in its integration of theory, design, and lived practice. Unlike many studies that document challenges or outcomes in isolation, this book systematically illustrates processes — from resource mobilisation and instructional design to stakeholder engagement, quality assurance, and teacher empowerment. In terms of impact, the book offers empirical evidence for the sustainability of ODFL and OER, presents transferable models of collaborative teacher professional development, informs policy and institutional decision-making, and reframes crisis-driven digital transformation as a pathway to long-term systemic change. Overall, the volume occupies a distinctive niche in the literature by bridging emergency education, teacher empowerment, and open learning ecosystems, thereby offering both conceptual advancement and actionable knowledge relevant to global education systems facing uncertainty, inequality, and rapid change. An important feature of the book is the reliance on open, accessible and scalable technologies and approaches. It is a vibrant testimony that the strategies and policies devised by the COL are actionable; effective policy-to-action cases. Furthermore, the book coherently adheres to the idea that technology is an enabler, not an end in itself. As potential avenues for future study, we hope many of these initiatives will be scaled up, adapted, and implemented in other Global South contexts.

Conclusion

This book is a testament to the effectiveness of COL networks and publications. They have proven useful when needed most. Indeed, the Covid-19 lockdown was a test for the Global South, where most Commonwealth countries are located. In this resource-constrained, geographically scattered, and culturally diverse context, the cases support the SDG 4 goals of equitable and inclusive education. Across the cases presented, teacher education is positioned as a tool for empowerment and development, grounded in open knowledge epistemologies. Though the cases dealt with technologies, none of them were tool-centric, rather, they relied on principled approaches such as instructional design.

Reviewer Notes

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