# Chapter 4.12
# Experiences in Collaboration in Distance Education from the Caribbean:
## Looking Beyond Electronic

**Christine Marrett**
*University of the West Indies, Open Campus, Jamaica*

## ABSTRACT

Information communication technologies (ICTs) have facilitated institutional collaboration in distance education. Based on the study, Institutional collaboration in distance education at the tertiary level in the small, developing countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean: To what extent does it enhance human resource development? (Marrett, 2006), the author examines the experiences in the Caribbean between 1982 and 2002. She explores not only the role played by ICTs, but also some of the issues that arise beyond those presented by the technology, highlighting aspects that need attention in order to ensure successful institutional collaboration in tertiary education, and makes recommendations to overcome the challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the advent and growth of information communication technology (ICT) has facilitated and increased various types of institutional collaboration. ICT is: *an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems, and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning. ICTs are often spoken of in a particular context, such as ICTs in education, healthcare, or libraries* (http://searchcio-midmarket.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid183_gci928405,00.html).

Regarding ICTs in education, the convergence of telecommunications, computing, and microelectronics in particular has "created a

whole new industry in service of education and training" (COL, 1998, p. 1). Additionally, ICTs are contributing to the increase of institutional collaboration in distance education, as evidenced in a study of institutional collaboration in distance education at the tertiary level occurring between 1982 and 2002 in the small, developing countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean. It was found that between 2000–2002, there were almost as many instances of collaboration (15) as obtained for the entire decade of the 1990s (20) (Marrett, 2006, p. 248). This was attributed to:

*(1) the growth of ICTs in the region, coupled with (2) the concomitant rise in awareness of distance education as an option for programme delivery on the part of the Caribbean institutions and (3) a concurrent push by the overseas institutions to make their programmes available internationally facilitated by the technology, funding and policies of internationalization* (Marrett, 2006, p. 248).

Based on the study, this chapter explores not only the role played by ICTs in the experiences in institutional collaboration in distance education at the tertiary level in the Caribbean between 1982 and 2002, but also some of the issues that arise beyond those presented by the technology, highlighting aspects that need attention in order to ensure successful institutional collaboration in tertiary education.

## BACKGROUND

### The Commonwealth Caribbean

Stretching in an arc from Belize in Central America, incorporating the Turks and Caicos Islands and the Bahamas Islands, and down the chain of islands that separate the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean, culminating in Guyana on the South American continent, the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean are small in both

population and geographical size. Apart from Jamaica (population about 2.7 million), Trinidad, and Tobago (population approximately 1.3 million), each country has a population of less than one million, including Belize and Guyana, with land masses of approximately 8,867 and 83,000 square miles, respectively, many times larger than their island counterparts. The total population of the region is some 6.5 million.

### Tertiary Education

According to Peters (2001, p. 47), the term "tertiary education" as used in the region may include university- and nonuniversity-level programmes, technical and vocational education and training, professional and paraprofessional training, and continuing education programmes, geared for persons over the age of 16 years. The determination of an educational institution as tertiary is the purview of either national accrediting bodies, where they exist, or the Ministry of Education of the country. This contrasts with jurisdictions such as Australia which make a distinction between higher education and tertiary education, with the former referring to degree level education and above offered almost exclusively by universities.

The establishment of universities in the Commonwealth Caribbean is a relatively new phenomenon when compared to the Americas. While Spain established universities in its colonies in the Americas as early as the 16th century and Britain founded universities in North America in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was not until 1948 that the University College of the West Indies was established as a regional university in the Commonwealth Caribbean, forerunner to The University of the West Indies (UWI), now serving 16 countries[1]. Since the mid to late 20th century, the establishment of universities in the region has picked up pace, largely through the amalgamation of existing institutions and the growth of off-shore universities. The most prevalent tertiary institutions are publicly funded community

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