

# Net to give villages benefit of expertise

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Australia will join the World Bank in setting up a revolutionary plan to spread education and access to knowledge throughout developing countries over the Internet.

In a breakthrough that could help countries to leapfrog the slow path of development, Australian educators and IT specialists will work with World Bank experts to create educational programs for villagers all over the world.

With the Internet accessible in developing countries, the government has accepted a challenge by the bank's president, Australian expatriate James Wolfensohn, to create an Internet version of the Colombo Plan — a scheme founded in 1951 that brought tens of thousands of Asian students and pro-

fessionals to Australia to learn skills critical to their countries' progress.

The Virtual Colombo Plan would range from basic education programs to higher-education teaching, improving knowledge technology in developing countries and lessons for policy makers.

The government believes Australia's expertise in distant education, information and communications technology and in bringing higher education to foreign students makes it ideally placed to partner the World Bank in its ambitious goal to build a global learning network.

Mr Wolfensohn, a Sydney University student in the '50s said last year: "In five years, we will be able to have Internet connectivity in any village anywhere in the world.

"It is a central issue for (overcoming) poverty ... a fantastic tool for development."