

LEARNING THROUGH SHARING : OPEN RESOURCES, OPEN PRACTICES, OPEN COMMUNICATION

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Giving away the recipes: Exploring attitudes to open education through narratives

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Abstract

This is part of ongoing work to introduce a stronger disciplinary perspective to a set of Open Educational Resources (OERs) about teaching and learning in higher education. The work is rooted in two UK OER projects, [CPD4HE](#) and [Sustainable Texts & Disciplinary Conversations](#). The broader area of interest is the embedding of open education practices in universities and the impact on teachers of developing and releasing resources.

The CPD4HE project suggested a significant impact on teachers who developed their materials as OERs. Thus, the follow-up project, Sustainable Texts, seeks to involve teaching staff across the disciplines in creating an e-book of academics' narratives, telling their stories about learning and teaching their subjects. It also aims to encourage conversations about OER practices. We focus here on the languages and linguistics 'disciplinary perspective' and conversations.

This is practice-based research progressing in iterative cycles. Interviews with teachers from the first project were used, together with previous research, to inform work with language teachers in the second project: a preliminary survey; interview and focus group; reflections on the process of contributing to the e-book; thoughts about how their attitudes towards OER have developed and potential implications for their teaching practice.

The first set of interviews revealed that creating OERs can have a transformative impact on both academics' sense of themselves as producers of materials and on their attitudes towards sharing and open licensing of their resources. Survey findings about OER experiences and attitudes were consistent with earlier research findings. The survey also served to engage the interest of a group of language teachers and we will report more fully on work with this group at the conference.

Background

The open education landscape includes large deposits of resources collected in online repositories associated with institutions (e.g. MIT, Open University), disciplinary networks, national and international organisations (e.g. [JORUM](#), [MERLOT](#)). Dedicated language learning repositories include [LORO](#), [Language Box](#) and [COERLL](#) and there are significant quantities of language learning material in MERLOT and JORUM. Resources in these repositories are becoming more accessible though better search tools, use of consistent technical standards and

clearer (Creative Commons¹) licensing. Although these are large collections, many potential users are still unaware of them (Rolfe 2012).

In the UK, development for OERs has been supported (by funders such as JISC and the HEA³) through several phases. Initially, the emphasis was on creating, sharing and archiving materials. Increasingly there is an interest in understanding how OERs are found and used (JISC 2011) and how to embed open education thinking and practices in university work. Examples relevant to language learning include the [L2O](#) project (2005-7), [Virtual Dutch](#) and [FAVOR](#) (2011-2012).

Alongside this development work, research has investigated what motivates institutions and individuals to engage with open education practices, the barriers to such engagement, usage and impact. Lane and McAndrew (2010), writing about the UK Open University's OpenLearn initiative, compare the impact of OER with that of its precursor, re-usable Learning Objects. They note that OERs have gained greater acceptance into practice than the more technologically led Learning Objects. They suggest that this is because there are fewer barriers to experimentation by teachers, which enables a participatory, action research approach.

Disciplinarity has also begun to feature in OER research. Perryman and Coughlan (2011) have investigated the OU Open Learn collection of OERs and found that Soft Applied disciplines (from Becher-Biglan typology), which include Languages and Education, are underrepresented in the OER curriculum when compared with the curriculum developed for fee-paying OU undergraduates. By contrast, resources from Hard Pure disciplines (science, technology, maths) are much better represented in the OER curriculum. Perryman and Coughlan speculate that reasons for the underrepresentation of Soft Applied disciplines might include the difficulty of replicating face-to-face teaching in OER in these subjects as well as the changing nature of knowledge and the curriculum in these fields. They suggest that in Hard Pure and Hard Applied domains that the curriculum is more stable and thus it is easier to select materials for OER.

Bates *et al.* (2007) and more recently Rolfe (2012) conducted surveys of attitudes and feelings about open release of teaching materials. Both found low levels of awareness of repositories. They also found that teaching materials were more commonly shared within institutions than outside. Bates *et al.* focus on the deposit of materials. They found that most respondents wished to place some restrictions on the rights of those who accessed their materials – although there was considerable variation in specifying these. Financial reward, such as a salary increment, might encourage sharing but the opportunity for an internal publication or pedagogical research would be less motivating.

¹ <http://creativecommons.org/>

³ the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA)

Anecdotal evidence from the CPD4HE project hinted at a significant impact on the participating teachers, none of whom had had any previous OER experience. It also suggested that both concerns and benefits identified in the literature were experienced by this group. We wished to explore further.

Aims

This part of the project has three main aims:

- To encourage language teachers to contribute to an e-book by providing written and/or spoken narratives about their experiences as teachers in higher education.
- To document the process and reflections on this.
- To find out whether and how the teachers' working practices and ideas about open education are influenced by involvement in publishing an OER.

Approach and methods

Action-reflection cycles with the reflection captured in different ways, mainly through conversations.

First Conversations

We arrived at an initial set of questions by reflecting on our own experiences as OER teacher-developers in the CPD4HE project.

- (a) In designing learning activities, have you become more aware of open resources that you can use and/or
- (b) Do you design your materials with a view to sharing them openly (e.g. paying attention to copyright of third party materials)?
- (c) Has there been any other impact on your working practices?
- (d) When developing your resource, how did you conceptualise audience? What is the impact of not knowing an audience?
- (e) Do you have any thoughts about the learners and their possible experiences with these materials?
- (f) What are your attitudes in terms of creative commons licensing of work you created? Did your attitudes towards licensing change during the process?
- (g) Did your sense of identity as academic authors/producers shift during the work?
- (h) Does this sort of work accord with your broader educational values? Has it shaped your values at all?
- (i) Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the creation of OERs and participation in an open education project?

All these questions were discussed in two interviews with teachers who had worked on the earlier project. One of the authors led each conversation; all four had developed OERs in the CPD4HE project. Conversations lasted approximately half an hour, were recorded, transcribed and analysed in order to identify themes and trends.

Language teacher engagement survey

To make contact with language teachers, we used a short online survey⁴. This was distributed to teachers in the institution who used the specialist language teaching space. The questions were adapted from Rolfe (2012) and informed by the findings of Bates *et al.* (2007). To make the survey quick to complete, all free text answers were optional and there were just six multiple-choice or rating-scale questions:

1. Do you ever share teaching materials?
2. Where do you obtain teaching materials?
3. How do you feel about other people using your materials?
4. How do you feel about using other people's materials?
5. Can you share teaching materials with teachers of other languages?
6. Would you like to know more about or participate in the Sustainable Texts project?

Further conversations and resource development⁵

Language teachers who expressed an interest in participating in the project were contacted and invited to a meeting, which covered:

1. An explanation of the Sustainable Texts project and the creation of the e-book resource including any necessary explanation of open education and OERs.
2. Ideas and experiences related to sharing and re-using teaching materials
3. Ideas about what, apart from teaching materials, would be of interest to contribute or to read.

Interim findings

From the first conversations.

The findings are reported in more detail in McKenna and Hughes (forthcoming). Particularly relevant to this study are the following:

It's writing/I'm an author	<i>"It was definitely being an author" "I do think of them as writing and they are textual materials [...] so when you are thinking about writing texts, you are thinking about audience and purpose";</i>
It was a good feeling	<i>"I felt really, really proud. I was so pleased with myself for doing them" "It's exciting producing something that's out there. You just don't know who's going to be looking at it. It's a good feeling. It's nice to be able to put something out there that you've worked on."</i>
I staked a claim	<i>"I felt that I had ... sort of staked a little bit of a claim in some of those areas [...]; "teaching is very, very private and it was making it public and it was in a public domain and, you know, it's got my name on it ..."</i>

⁴ Using Survey Monkey: www.surveymonkey.com

⁵ Most of the work outlined in this section is taking place in March and results will be included in discussion at the SIG workshop.

I would cite it/use it as evidence	<p><i>"I had to write my homepage for the web, so you have to put all your selected publications and your conference publications and I didn't know exactly where to put it, but I thought 'I'm putting on my OERs ... because I'm really proud of them."</i></p> <p><i>(Would you put it on your CV?) Definitely. (What about status; do you feel more proud of your PhD?) "No because this is really useful and we know no-one reads your PhD thesis. [...] It may not be on a par from the point of view of academic prestige but actually I think it should be".</i></p>
It fits my values	<p><i>"[...] in terms of the content of the OER development and the process or the idea of OER and Creative Commons. I think both are a very good match for my existing values".</i></p> <p><i>"I have always felt happy for people to use my materials. I now upload the materials I use and say people can use them but they're on moodle not a publically available site"</i></p> <p><i>"I've started putting the Creative Commons logo on my slides"</i></p> <p><i>" through my whole teaching career if anybody had wanted to use my handbook or teaching materials or anything, they'd ask me and I'd always say 'yes'."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel education should be free"</i></p>
I became more aware of OERs and repositories.	<p><i>"I'd never heard of JORUM until I was involved in this project. So, I think that's probably the main benefit to me from doing it is that I've realised that there is that stuff out there and you can look for it and find it and use it yourself."</i></p>
I now use OERs	<p><i>"I have already! [...] there's nice stuff out there on inclusive curriculum .."</i></p>
It was a lot of work	<p><i>"It was a huge amount of work [...] You don't just upload stuff you have anyway"</i></p>
You need technical support	<p><i>"We had our fantastic technical support [person on the project] who actually took the Word document and changed it into things. I don't ... I would actually have to go and talk to somebody about how to do that."</i></p>
Value doesn't just rest in the resources	<p><i>"I think there are tensions, because people think they should be able to exploit their own work which is quite right, they should, But nobody else should be able to. Which is fair enough. But then I think there's a misunderstanding about what you sell when you sell things. and I think what you're selling is not the material, what you sell is, say, in terms of courses, is the tutoring, that goes with it."</i></p> <p><i>"[...] the value lies in the expertise of the person using</i></p>

	<p><i>the materials. I think that's so true. And maybe the person using the materials may have another sort of expertise and you have your own expertise. And I think the interaction with the learners is so important.</i></p> <p><i>If somebody else uses my materials it wouldn't be the same anyway. Maybe it would be better but it would be different."</i></p>
IPR is still an issue	<p><i>"it seems the best protection against the exploitation of your work without acknowledgement and without permission is to put it out there, publicly but ask for the attribution and not for the commercial exploitation."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm not sure where I am on licensing at the moment"</i></p>
Re-use of your materials doesn't diminish your teaching or institutional 'currency'	<p><i>The analogy with a restaurant is that River Cafe [London restaurant] have published a cookbook with their recipes... it has not stopped them exploiting that intellectual property right if you like by cooking the meals and having people come to the restaurant, I'm sure it hasn't damaged that at all ... it's enhanced it. And that's how I see OERs: You're giving away the recipes, but people will still come to you</i></p>

Survey

The survey is still open. Based on a small number of responses to date:

- A majority share their teaching materials within the institution but not outside.
- They write their own materials, use textbooks and obtain resources from YouTube and other websites but not from national or international repositories.
- A majority feel some concern about commercial use of their materials.
- Most feel undecided or neutral about copyright in relation to their own materials but are not concerned about copyright in relation to their use of others' materials.
- They are unsure whether releasing resources would enhance reputation.
- They believe to some extent that they could save time and get ideas from re-use of others' materials.

Follow-up conversations

Based on the first of these meetings:

- The term, OER, was unfamiliar but the e-book was interesting because it could be regarded as a publication.
- Sharing materials was familiar practice but not problem-free. The teacher gave materials to graduate teaching assistants but felt they lacked the experience or training to make good use of them.
- Echoing findings of Comas-Quinn *et al.* (2011), she also described herself as skeptical in relation to using other people's resources, even textbooks, because a different institutional context, teacher and students mean the

materials always need to be adapted. Two exceptions were: a textbook materials developed by a colleague in another institution, which she had used successfully in that institution; a collection of games and role-plays.

- Ideas for e-book content were: student narratives (a strong recommendation); teacher experiences of working conditions and career paths; translations of texts; cultural material, for example about art.

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