

OER for Development (OER4D)



22 April 2015

Presented at the Open Education Global Conference 2015
Banff, Canada

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My topic today is OER for Development.

This links closely with what COL promotes: Learning for development.

The Commonwealth has 53 Member States, 47 of which are developing countries. We are very fortunate to be located in beautiful British Columbia, thanks to our hosts, the Government of Canada.

I'll speak briefly about whether OER are addressing some of the development challenges in countries of the global south and the strategies we might adopt to harness OER to achieve development objectives.

The MDGs, which have helped the international community to achieve many targets such as poverty reduction and UPE will come to a close this year, to be followed by a successor framework—the sustainable development goals that will define the development agenda for the next 15 years.

Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs identified, focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The goal has several targets that emphasise quality education leading to effective learning outcomes, knowledge and skills for employment and entrepreneurship and global citizenship, and the importance of having qualified teachers in place to achieve these targets.

The Commonwealth inter-ministerial working group has identified access, quality and equity as the three pillars of its post-2015 framework for education.

How can we harness OER to help us enhance access and equity, reduce costs and improve quality?

COL and UNESCO organized the 2012 World OER Congress in Paris, with generous support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation which resulted in the Paris Declaration on OER.

This has been a landmark development and as the recent Hewlett evaluation report states 'The declaration provides an anchor and a direction for COL, UNESCO...and other advocates . It is an important reference for OER work'.

What are the key trends that we have noted after 2012?

More developing countries have now joined the OER movement. Even though we still note a great need for advocacy, many countries and institutions are moving from policy to practice. Open textbooks are beginning to capture the imagination of policy makers and practitioners. While initially OER were primarily available in English, there are more multilingual OER available today. With the rise of MOOCs,

we find that while many still use ‘closed’ content, there is a move towards integrating OER into MOOCs. Let me give examples of each of these trends.

COL has developed the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), a consortium of institutions from 31 small states of the Commonwealth which have come together to develop needs-based courses which are freely available, as OER.

COL also maintains an online directory service for OER from the Commonwealth countries. Looking at the data, we find that universities from developing countries are publishing large quantities of OER. The open universities in India, Nigeria, South Africa and Pakistan are significant producers.

You can see that countries in the Commonwealth such as South Africa, Mauritius and India, among others, have developed OER policies at the national level.

COL has helped the government of Antigua and Barbuda to embed OER in their ICT in Education Policy. The Ministry will adopt an open licence for all publicly funded materials and have started implementing open textbooks in Maths. Grenada and St Vincent & the Grenadines are next in the process of developing policies.

COL has developed a prototype for developing open textbooks and this is being piloted by Antigua and Barbuda, to be taken up by the other OECS countries.

Today an increasing number of OER are available in different languages. Khan Academy is translating its content into various languages and their materials in Urdu are being offered in some schools in Pakistan. Jinpinke is the Chinese government’s repository in OER in Mandarin. The European Union has developed a platform for translating OER into different European languages.

Here are some women In COL’s lifelong learning for farmers programme listening to audio content in their own language.

COL in partnership with IIT-Kanpur offered three MOOCs: on mobiles-for-development, a MOOC on MOOCs and an audio MOOC for gardeners delivered through basic mobile phones. The content of these MOOCs are available as OER. SLIDE 22

We have seen some of the ways in which OER are being used in developing countries.

In which ways has the Commonwealth of Learning contributed to the promotion and use of OER? COL has focused on four areas: one, advocacy and awareness generation; two, policy development on OER at the national and institutional levels; three, capacity building and four, promoting research through its publications on OER and its Chairs programme.

You can see that our distinguished UNESCO-COL Chairs Prof. Rory McGreal and Dr. Wayne Macintosh, who are right here.

The COL approach is to involve as many stakeholders as possible. COL also promotes collaboration in the development and sharing of OER across cultures. The OER must be available in different formats for diverse constituencies and through appropriate technologies especially mobile devices. Finally COL takes a holistic approach and believes that advocacy must lead to capacity building so that OER policy can be developed and deployed.

In spite of the efforts made by the international and national OER communities, there are certain major issues that need to be addressed for OER to realise their transformative potential. OER cannot be viewed

entirely from the cost and technology perspectives. What of the social dimension? After all, OER emerged as a social process of sharing and collaboration using ICTs

Can OER help us address issues of equity and inequality? Justin Reich argues that OER by itself will not address equity issues. Institutions and groups with better access to resources and infrastructure will make more use of the educational technology innovations such as free and open resources rather than marginalized groups.

Similarly teachers in low-resource contexts cannot participate in this movement to the extent that their more privileged counterparts can... because they lack the planning time, broadband access, etc.

In fact it is these teachers in remote locations that need OER most. As teachers are the primary stakeholders, can the OER movement flourish without their participation?

If we look at this slide based on a DFID study, we find it shows that a high percentage of teachers are hungry when they come to class. Would it be realistic to expect them to become proactive stakeholders in OER?

Then the digital divide across the world is still alive and well. While in North America, there are over 80 internet users per 100 persons, the LDCs, the number of internet users is less than 5 percent. So if we look at OER as 'technology' we certainly start with a disadvantage. We need to consider issues such as stakeholder engagement and the politics of power.

In his analysis of the networked society, Castells (2009) has elaborated the network-making power which operates on the basis of two mechanisms: the ability to constitute, program and reprogram networks and the ability to connect and ensure cooperation. Many important stakeholders of education may be far beyond this network-making power due to regional, gender, class and ethnic factors. It is obvious that Africa, South Asia and Latin America may have limited potential in network-making power. These types of power play a major role in the inclusion-exclusion of various stakeholders.

COL is working to include the most remote and the marginalized and has developed Aptus or the Classroom Without Walls. This enables teachers and students to access good quality digital materials. In a remote island in Kiribati, learners can access the Wikipedia for schools containing over 6000 articles, or the 2000 Khan Academy videos and a whole library of free books in addition to the content uploaded by the teachers.

Another issue is how to involve a wider constituency of stakeholders. Innovative approaches are needed to include various stakeholders in the development, renewal and use of content so that passive consumers can become active producers of knowledge. How can we work together to complement our various efforts?

Can we re-define OER4D as an empowerment process, facilitated by technology in which various types of stakeholders are able to interact, collaborate, create and use materials and pedagogic practices, that are freely available, for enhancing access, reducing costs and improving the quality of education and learning at all levels? By doing so we can work together to promote inclusive and equitable lifelong learning for all by 2030.

With that, let me thank you for your kind attention.