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9 Openness in Education

Having looked at scholarship and Boyer's four scholarly functions in Chapters 4–8, this section of the book, Chapters 9–12, examines the context in higher education, academia and universities within which digital scholarship is establishing itself.

Of the three characteristics of digital, networked and open, it is the latter that perhaps has most resonance in the scholarly context, and so in this chapter I want to explore the changing nature of 'openness' in education and the different interpretations and issues it raises.

The changing nature of openness

When the Open University (OU) in the United Kingdom was founded in 1969, its mission statement was to be 'Open to people, places, methods and ideas'. The emphasis in open education then was on open access – thus a model was developed which had no prerequisites to study and was based around a flexible distance learning model. In this manner many of those who were excluded from higher education could participate. As more universities have developed distance education models, part-time study, blended and online offerings, the question of access to higher education in the developed world is less of an issue than it was at the inception of the OU. In the United Kingdom, the percentage of young people (18- to 22-year-olds) attending university in 2008–9 was 45 per cent, compared with about 5 per cent in the 1960s (with 51 per cent of young women attending university) (Coughlan 2010). In terms of access, the lifelong learning agenda and provision of flexible study has seen mature students (usually defined as over 25) now outnumbering traditional students in many countries (e.g. MacFadgen 2008). The current financial crisis has seen a drop in admissions for the first time in over a decade, so open access may become an increasingly significant factor again. In many developing countries, which are seeing a rapid expansion in higher education, open access is a highly relevant issue.

Returning to the OU mission statement, it has survived remarkably well, but the examples we might call to mind for realising openness with regards to people, places, methods and ideas would now be different from those envisaged in 1969. Although open access is still a relevant issue for education, we have also seen a plethora of other interpretations and nuances on the term 'openness' and how it

relates to education over the past two decades in particular. This speaks to the evolving nature of the term and also the efficacy of openness as an approach, be it in developing software or conducting research. The following are amongst the terms that are relevant to education:

- 1 Open source – much of the open source software movement had its foundations in higher education, and universities both develop and deploy open source solutions.
- 2 Open educational resources – the term OER was coined in 2002 to describe the application of open source principles to the release of educational content, initiated by MIT's OCW project. We will look at OERs in more detail below.
- 3 Open courses – as well as releasing content as OERs a number of educators have begun exploring the concept of open courses, which are delivered online, with various models for payment (or entirely free).
- 4 Open research – researchers are using a number of approaches to perform research practices in the open, including crowdsourcing, open online conferences, open proposals and so on.
- 5 Open data – as well as sharing data openly (e.g. <http://www.realclimate.org>), there has also been a move to develop standards such as Linked Data, to connect and expose the vast quantities of data that are now available.
- 6 Open APIs – the recent Web 2.0 approach saw an increase in the use of open APIs. These allow other software developers to build tools and code that interrogate the data in one application. For example, both Facebook and Twitter have open APIs that facilitate the development of services which build on top of these existing tools.
- 7 Open access publishing – the ability to publish cheaply and quickly online has led to a movement around open access publishing, which is freely available and may use open peer review models. We will look at publishing in more detail in Chapter 12.

Openness has almost become a cliché in education now; after all, few people will argue in favour of a 'closed' education. It is a term which is loosely applied, and having gained currency, much like the 'Web 2.0', the term is now one that is being appropriated in many different sectors. What I will attempt to do in this section is not to create a tight definition of openness in education, but rather describe some of the features that characterise it.

Digital and networked

Open education can be realised in many ways – holding a public lecture, devising a mobile schools program and so on could all be deemed to be open education. While such approaches are important, and in many contexts appropriate, what we are concerned with in the current debates about open education are the changes in practice that are afforded and influenced by two technological aspects outlined in Chapter 1:

- 1 It is based on digital content, where content can include debates, video, text, audio, forums and so on.
- 2 Resources are shared via a global network, both technical and social.

The combination of digital content and a global, socially oriented distribution network has created the conditions in which new interpretations of open education can develop. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 4, some commentators have begun to talk of the ‘open scholar’, which is almost synonymous with the ‘digital scholar’; so closely aligned are the new technologies and open approaches. For example, Gideon Burton (2009) makes the explicit link between openness and digital technologies:

The traditional scholar, like the scholarship he or she produces, isn’t open – open-minded, hopefully, but not ‘open’ in a public way. No, a typical scholar is very exclusive, available only to students in specific academic programs or through toll-access scholarly publications that are essentially unavailable to all but the most privileged. In the digital age, the traditional barriers to accessing scholars or scholarship are unnecessary, but persist for institutional reasons.

There are two questions this link between new technologies and open education raises. The first is, what are the mechanisms by which new technologies have facilitated openness? The second is, why is openness seen as a desirable and effective mode of operation in the digital networked environment?

I will address both of these questions, but first it is worth delineating some of the characteristics of openness in education. Anderson (2009) suggests a number of activities that characterise the open scholars, including that they

- create,
- use and contribute open educational resources,
- self-archive,
- apply their research,

- do open research,
- filter and share with others,
- support emerging open learning alternatives,
- publish in open access journals,
- comment openly on the works of others, and
- build networks.

We might argue about some of these and whether all are required to meet the definition of an open scholar, but Anderson's list matches many of the subjects in this book and represents a good overview of a digital, networked and open approach to practice. From my own experience I would propose the following set of characteristics and suggest that open scholars are likely to adopt these.

- Have a distributed online identity – using a variety of services an identity is distributed depending on the means by which the individual is encountered.
- Have a central place for their identity – although their identity is distributed, there is usually one central hub, such as a blog, wiki or aggregation service page (e.g. <http://flavors.me/>).
- Have cultivated an online network of peers – the open scholar usually engages in social networks through a preferred service (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Friendfeed) and regularly contributes to that network.
- Have developed a personal learning environment from a range of tools – the open scholar develops a suite of preferred tools not through a deliberate policy of constructing a PLE but through personal trial and error.
- Engage with open publishing – when formal publications are produced open scholars will seek an open publishing route for their dissemination.
- Create a range of informal output – as well as producing traditional outputs, the open scholar produces and explores different forms of output such as video, podcast, slidecast and so on.
- Try new technologies – there is an acceptance that technology is not fixed and that new technologies are explored on an individual, *ad hoc* basis to ascertain where they fit into the individual's overall portfolio of tools.
- Mix personal and professional outputs – the social network space is characterised by the personal elements its participants reveal, which can be

seen as the hooks through which connections are established. The open scholar deliberately mixes personal and professional observations in order to be an effective communicator within these networks and does not seek to keep them distinct.

- Use new technologies to support teaching and research – when assessing or adopting new technologies they will be appraised not only for their use on a personal basis but also how they can be used to support professional practice, such as using social bookmarking for a research group or creating student portfolios in Friendfeed.
- Automatically create and share outputs – the default position of an open scholar is to share outputs, be they presentations, ideas, suggestions or publications, using whatever route is appropriate.

While not every open scholar will adopt every one of these practices, they provide an archetypal set of characteristics which allow comparison with traditional scholarly practice and also move away from some of the limitations of a straightforward classification of ‘digital’.

Having suggested a range of characteristics for open scholars, the two questions set out above can now be addressed, which seek to explore the connection between digital technologies and the evolution of open education.

The facilitation of openness

The first issue relates to the mechanism(s) by which new technologies have facilitated openness. In the characteristics set out above, it is the last characteristic that is arguably the most significant, the default assumption, desire and ability, to share. This can be seen as the one action that has been fundamentally altered by the digital network.

This has occurred because successive technologies have built on existing networks, and the Web 2.0 explosion in recent years in particular has seen a proliferation of free tools whose basic proposition is to distribute content across the network. While media sharing sites such as YouTube, Flickr and Slideshare are destination sites in their own right, much of their success has been built upon existing networks, particularly that of blogs and social media sites such as Facebook. The ease of sharing has been greatly increased by some data standards, including RSS and embed codes which allow users to take content from one site and easily import it into another.

Leslie (2008) comments on the ease of this everyday sharing, compared with the complexity inherent in many institutional approaches:

I have been asked to participate in many projects over the years that start once a bunch of departments, institutions or organizations notice that they

have a lot in common with others and decide that it would be a good idea to collaborate, to share 'best practices' or 'data' or whatever ...

But inevitably, with a very few exceptions, these projects spend an enormous amount of time defining what is to be shared, figuring out how to share it, setting up the mechanisms to share it, and then ... not really sharing much ...

Now I contrast that with the learning networks which I inhabit, and in which every single day I share my learning and have knowledge and learning shared back with me. I know it works.

An illustrative example here can be taken from the music industry. To share music with friends used to be costly, in terms of time and resource. So, to share music, an individual might be required to purchase a tape, record all the songs (which would take at least the length of the tape and probably longer) and then would give the tape away and so would no longer own the resultant mix. Compare this with digital network versions of sharing and the use of services such as LastFM, which allow people to share music they have been listening to and, through data mining, recommend similar music. Through tools such as Spotify and iTunes it is easy to share a playlist by simply making it public. Other tools such as Blip.fm allow easy sharing through social networks such as Twitter. In all of these cases the effort required to share is greatly reduced and is often a frictionless by-product of actions performed by the individual. In terms of both finance and time the cost of sharing has effectively disappeared.

This same ease of sharing applies in scholarly terms also. Three levels of this new, lightweight sharing can be categorised, showing increasing effort on the part of the sharer:

- 1** Frictionless – sharing that occurs without any additional effort required, for example, if a scholar is gathering resources for her own research, then using a social bookmarking tool is an effective tool for her as well as making the list public.
- 2** Quick sharing – this requires a small level of effort, so does not occur simply as a by-product, but the effort required is minimal, such as sharing a link via Facebook or uploading a Powerpoint presentation to Slideshare.
- 3** Content creation – this requires some effort to produce a digital artefact, for instance, creating a blog post, a YouTube movie, or adding and synchronising audio to a presentation to create a 'slidecast'. The effort and expertise required are still relatively low compared to many traditional forms of output.

In addition, there will be traditional artefacts, such as journal articles, which can take a long time to produce but can be easily shared online. There is an initial investment required in acquiring some expertise in using the tools necessary for effective sharing, but the technical ability threshold is low; it is rather a question of changes in practice. As Leslie's quote illustrates, some of the default attitudes towards sharing, from both institutions and scholars, are grounded in a model where the process of sharing is a logistical and categorisation issue.

The ease with which sharing can occur has inevitably led many scholars to adopt this practice as a means of dissemination, debate, teaching and research. However, being able to share easily is not the same as it being effective and worthwhile to do so. It is this aspect we will look at next.

The effectiveness of openness

This section will look at the second question about openness, that is, why has this mode of working been adopted, in varying degrees, across all aspects of education? Is it an inevitable consequence of the digital network or that previously difficult, but desirable, models of working are now realisable?

One way of approaching this is to look at the citation levels of articles that are published online versus those that are in closed access journals. Hajjem, Harnad and Gingras (2005) compared 1,307,038 articles across a range of disciplines and found that open access articles have a higher citation impact of between 36 and 172 per cent.

So publishing in an online, open manner aids in the traditional measures of citation. In addition, there are a number of other benefits. As outlined in Chapter 4, the crowdsourcing approach to research allows researchers to gather input from a wide range of users. In 'Amazing Stories of Openness', Levine (2009) crowdsourced contributions, and provided examples that include translations of resources, technical developments on an initial diagram, offers to give keynote talks, job offers, ideas for teaching, feedback on dissertations and so on.

The term 'lazyweb' refers to the practice of asking questions of one's network, rather than researching it yourself. This lighthearted term underplays a significant function of your social network, which is access to experts, peer and a wealth of experience which you can draw upon easily. However, you are only likely to get a response from your network if you have in turn been open. Reciprocity is key.

This notion of reciprocity is essential in maintaining an effective network of peers. Using blogs and Twitter as examples, the relationship between a blogger and a reader is maintained if the blogger provides interesting and regular updates. This notion of reciprocal, but not identical, activity can be used for more subtle interactions, what might be termed 'shifted reciprocity'. For instance, a lazyweb

request on Twitter is likely to be successful if the requester has either responded previously to such requests (standard reciprocity) or has given enough of herself to the network such that people feel well disposed towards her (shifted reciprocity).

In this sense then we can begin to think of an economy of reciprocity. In this economy, the more you give online *that is of value* to those in your network then the more 'credit' you establish. This allows us to see that spamming is negative behaviour – it is not establishing a reciprocal relationship. But also if we look at, for instance, Sarah Horrigan's (2009) list of Twitter etiquette, she suggests the following for users:

- Fill in your profile.
- Picture please – it doesn't have to be anything much, but I do like to see that I'm talking to someone or something.
- Don't protect your updates – Twitter is social ... it's not a private club.
- Participate, don't just aggregate – I'm sure no one minds the odd bit of blog promotion ... but actively participating with a few thoughts of your own sure makes for a more interesting Twitter.
- Update, don't stagnate.
- Learn the importance of @ and 'd'.
- Retweet selectively.

Most of these suggestions can be interpreted as advice on establishing reciprocity. If someone doesn't have a profile, or doesn't update regularly, then her reciprocal currency is diminished. It also helps us frame our behaviour in any new tool; for instance, setting up auto-follows and direct messages in Twitter is devaluing the reciprocal nature of following – I know you'll follow me back if I follow you, but that means that decision isn't based on any assessment of my value to your network. Therefore the reciprocal value to each party is likely to be less. Within a reciprocity economy we build up a sense of identity capital, and reciprocity is the 'currency' through which exchange is realised. As in any economy establishing any status requires effort, time or innovation.

This is not as altruistic or unrealistic as it might seem. Nowak and Roch (2007) analysed 'upstream reciprocity' behaviour; that is, when the recipients of an act of kindness are more likely to help others in turn, even if the person who benefits from their generosity is somebody else. They conclude that although there is a cost associated with upstream reciprocity, it tends to evolve as a result of the positive feeling of gratitude and when direct reciprocity is also present, with a resultant increase in reciprocity and altruism in society as a whole.

Sharing, and thus openness, is the base, the *sine qua non* of an online social network, since if no one shares then you cannot even begin to establish a network. And once it has started, the evidence is that it tends to multiply, so reciprocity becomes a consequence of the network. Therefore, in order to realise many of the benefits of a social network, openness is a prerequisite, which means that it becomes an effective strategy for working.

Open education as a ‘movement’

The open education approach can be viewed as more than simply an effective working method, however. There is a view which has it as a ‘movement’, which whilst not deliberately setting out to do so, has a broad set of agreed principles and a number of leaders or prominent figures, such as David Wiley, Michael Wesch and Larry Lessig. In general, the movement can be characterised as being

- technologically competent,
- interested in new technologies,
- active online,
- against proprietary copyright,
- in favour of new rights, such as Creative Commons,
- have a preference for loosely coupled technology systems compared with centralised LMSs, and
- have a preference for new forms of outputs.

Nearly all members of any movement will resist categorisation, but there is an increasingly political dimension to much of the open education movement, which is seen particularly when legislation seeks to curtail the rights of online activity; for example, the digital economy bill in the United Kingdom was widely protested against by those who could be classified as being part of the open education movement, and net neutrality is also seen as a key issue amongst this group.

Perhaps the most visible, and well funded, part of the open education movement is the generation of free, openly accessible content in the form of OERs, so it is worth looking at these in detail as they highlight many of the issues raised by open education.

Open educational resources

This section will look at the most concrete realisation of the open education movement, namely that of open education resources. In particular I want to revisit

the notion of granularity and how changes in this, afforded by new technologies, are changing scholarly behaviour.

Open educational resources started in earnest with the MIT OCW initiative (<http://ocw.mit.edu/index.html>). This was started in 2001 through a grant from the Hewlett Foundation, with the aim of making all course materials available online. OCW constituted a very important statement. At a time when many universities and content providers were seeking to find ever-more stringent methods of protecting their materials, OCW acted as an antidote to this and made people think about an alternative, open source-based approach.

OERs can be seen as a development on the previous work of learning objects (Wiley 2001), which sought to develop reusable, shareable pieces of learning material. A number of projects were set up to generate learning objects and to create repositories to house them, for example, MERLOT.

Much of the focus on OERs has been around large-scale, externally funded OER projects such as MIT's OCW and the OU's OpenLearn projects. These have been successful in raising the profile of open education, creating a semi-politicised open movement and in generating impressive download figures of resources (e.g. Carson 2005).

If one broadens the definition of OERs to encompass resources produced by individuals and shared on sites outside the formal education portals, for example, YouTube, Slideshare and Flickr, then a continuum of resources can be considered. These vary in granularity, quality and explicit learning intentions. This wider definition of OERs to include any open resource used in learning can broadly be characterised into two types of OERs, namely 'big' and 'little' OERs (from Hoyle 2009). As with classification of science into big and little (Price 1963) the distinction is not perfect, but it addresses two fundamentally different approaches, which can be seen as complementary. For OERs the differences can be summarised as follows:

- Big OERs are institutionally generated ones that arise from projects such as Open Courseware and OpenLearn. These are usually of high quality, contain explicit teaching aims, are presented in a uniform style and form part of a time-limited, focused project with portal and associated research and data.
- Little OERs are individually produced, low cost resources. They are produced by anyone, not just educators, may not have explicit educational aims, have low production quality and are shared through a range of third party sites and services.

Using this simple granularity classification, we can explore some of the issues around OERs and open education in general.

Status

I was involved in a project promoting the use of OERs in some ACP (Asia–Caribbean–Pacific) countries. When we evaluated the uptake of the project, all of the partners reported reluctance by academics to reuse content from others. Much of this resistance was allied with notions of identity and status (Rennie and Weller 2010). To reuse someone else’s content in teaching was interpreted as a sign of weakness or a threat to their (often hard-won) status as expert. This objection was somewhat alleviated when the provider of the content was a recognised university with an international reputation. In this case, the big OERs have an advantage, because there is both a sense of mistrust about the type of material produced for little OERs and also an anxiety that their use would be perceived as unprofessional. The large-scale OER projects tend to have a pre-publication filter policy, so only high-quality material is released. It also has the associated university brand linked to it, so there is a quality ‘badge’ and recognised reputation, which can be seen as enhancing the individual lecturer’s quality and teaching.

Big OERs could be viewed as a ‘colonising species’, whereby their presence changes the environment to make it more favourable for subsequent acts of reuse, such as little OERs.

Aggregation and adaptation

Many of the big OERs have explicit learning aims associated with them or at least an intended level and audience. Little OERs, however, are created for a variety of purposes and rarely have explicit learning metadata associated with them. This means that big OERs are a useful starting point and can often be used ‘wholesale’, that is, without adaptation. Indeed, the experience of the OpenLearn project has been that very few units are changed or adapted for use. The OpenLearn research report states,

In relation to repurposing, initially it was thought:

- 1 that it was not anyone’s current role to remix and reuse;
- 2 the content provided on the site was of high quality and so discouraged alteration;
- 3 there were few examples showing the method and value of remixing;
- 4 the use of unfamiliar formats (such as XML) meant that users were uncertain how to proceed. (McAndrew *et al.* 2009)

There were a number of collaborative projects established between the OpenLearn team and other institutions whereby content was adapted for use, for example, translation into Spanish of all published resources.

With little OERs, their use is often unpredictable, precisely because they are a smaller granularity and do not have the same level of intentionality associated with them. An example might be an image shared on Flickr, which depicts, say, a collection of toys, and is used in a presentation as a representation of diversity within a community. The resource may not be adapted, but it is used in an unintended and unpredicted context. This is another example of what Zittrain (2008) terms 'generativity', which he defines as 'a system's capacity to produce unanticipated change through unfiltered contributions from broad and varied audiences'. Little OERs are high in generativity because they can easily be used in different contexts, whereas the context is embedded within big OERs, which in turn means they are better at meeting a specific learning aim.

This may indicate that different patterns of use will operate for big and little OERs. With the former the emphasis is on adaptation, taking large chunks of content and expending resource in adapting it to local use. An example of this is the essay writing course developed at the University of the South Pacific (<http://www.usp.ac.fj/studyskills/CFDL/module1.html>), which was adapted from a course developed by three New Zealand tertiary institutions. Little OER use tends to be focused less on adaptation and more on aggregation, that is, taking a number of different resources and creating a cohesive educational narrative that brings these together.

Models of sustainability

The sustainability of big OER projects has been an issue of concern since their inception. As Wiley (2007) puts it,

[T]he William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has put millions of dollars into university-based open educational resource projects around the world. Given the current budget climate for education, a concern naturally arises about the future of the university-based open educational resource projects. What will happen when the targeted external dollars dry up? Will the initiatives themselves also dry up? How are these initiatives to sustain themselves over time?

Big OER projects have a variety of models of funding, and Wiley highlights three of these demonstrating a range of centralisation: a centralised team funded by donors and grants (such as MIT), linking it into teaching responsibilities (as practised at Utah State University) and a decentralised collaborative authoring approach (e.g. Rice Connexions, <http://cnx.org>).

The costs vary for these approaches, with MIT estimating it to be approximately US\$10,000 per course, and the Rice model being close to free as courses are

created by interested parties, as with open source software. The returns for institutions may vary also; for example, the OpenLearn project was responsible for generating about 7,000 course registrations in one year, improving the OU's global presence, generating publicity, operating as a basis for research funding and a means for establishing partnerships (McAndrew *et al.* 2009). This was partly a function of the OERs being direct OU content, unlike the Rice model.

The sustainability of little OERs is less of an issue and is probably closest to the second of Wiley's models. As outlined above little OERs arise from relatively low-cost forms of sharing. For example, if a presentation is given, then uploading it to Slideshare is a zero-cost activity, and adding a synchronised audio file to create a slidecast takes only a modest amount of time. The result is a shareable OER that can be aggregated and used elsewhere, as suggested in Chapter 7.

Affordances of OERs

Both Wiley and McAndrew *et al.* (2009) state that individual users don't tend to adapt OERs (which in this case refers to big OERs). The reasons for this are varied, including technical complexity and motivation. One other reason which the OpenLearn team suggest is that the 'content provided on the site was of high quality and so discouraged alteration'. This is an interesting observation as it seems to indicate that high-quality content encourages a somewhat passive acceptance. In this sense big OERs may be seen to be akin to broadcast content. The OpenLearn team also reported that social interaction was not a high priority for most users: 'a large choice of content is considered the most important feature of OpenLearn and that interacting with other learners is low on this list' (although there was an active subset of users who were identified as social learners and made extensive use of forums).

In contrast the low production quality of little OERs has the effect of encouraging further participation. The implicit message in these OERs is that the consumer can become a producer – they are an invitation to participate precisely because of their low quality. Whether this is in writing a blog post that links to it or in creating a video reaction, the low threshold to content creation is a feature of little OERs. Not all users of a site will become creators; YouTube claims that '52 percent of 18-34 year-olds share videos often with friends and colleagues', whereas the majority of Wikipedia edits are performed by a small group of users (Ortega 2009).

In educational terms it may be that both have a role to play within a learning context or course. Learners may want to feel the reassurance of the quality brand material for core content, but they may also want a mixture of the more social, participatory media that encourages them to contribute.

Portals and sites

The traffic to many of the big OER sites is reasonably impressive. Most big OER projects have a specific site associated with them, although their content may be used to populate other portals and repositories also.

Little OERs tend to be found on third-party, 'Web 2.0' type services, such as Slideshare, YouTube, Scribd and so on. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches, which are summarised in Table 9.1.

So, for example, Slideshare is a site for sharing Powerpoint presentations, to which you can add audio too, favourite, comment upon and embed elsewhere. It attracts significantly more web traffic than MIT's OCW site but, of course, features presentations about all manner of subject. This raises a number of questions:

- Are people more likely to share content through a service such as Slideshare? If so, why? Is it because it is easier or because they may gain a greater number of views?
- Is the basic unit of sharing (the presentation) at Slideshare a granularity, people understand more than courses and units at OER sites?
- Is the comparison fair? Can we consider Slideshare an OER repository of sorts?

Table 9.1 Advantages and disadvantages of OER portals and third-party sites

	Specific project site	Third-party site
Advantages	Greater brand link	Greater traffic
	Link through to courses	Cheaper
	Control	Greater serendipity
	Ability to conduct research	Expertise in social software development
Disadvantages	Requires specialist team	Can lose service
	Requires updating	No control, for example, over downtimes
	Lower traffic	Loss of ownership of data
	More expensive	Other non-educational content also present

- Are commercial operations better at developing sites and adding in the necessary functionality than educational ones?
- Are people learning from Slideshare? If so, how does it compare with learning from OERs?
- What are the dangers that your resources will be lost on Slideshare, and what use is your data being put to?

At the moment we are too early in the development of OERs and these third-party services to answer many of these questions, but the different hosting options of big and little OERs raise these issues for educators.

The role of context

The following anecdote is well known and, while true, was also concocted by *The Washington Post* (Weingarten 2007):

A man sat at a metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousands of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the top musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written, with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars.

Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theatre in Boston and the seats average \$100.

The moral of the story is usually taken to be that people don't stop and appreciate what is around them, and in their busy lives they can pass by things of beauty and value. But it has some lessons for the discussion of OERs also.

The first may be that people don't value free things or are suspicious of free. We have become accustomed to roughly equating monetary price with value or quality. Free is therefore obviously of low quality or suspicious at least. There is a general expectation that online resources will be free, although the success of iTunes apps is beginning to challenge this. But in education there is still an expectation that high-quality education costs. OERs are, of course, only part of the educational offering – they are

the content, and just as important are the associated elements outlined in Chapter 3, such as accreditation. But big OERs have a relationship to price when they are the learning materials used by universities. The message then is that some people have valued them highly enough to pay for them (and the associated services). Little OER, by its very nature, has not been paid for and so one variable people use to judge value is absent, namely whether someone would pay for it.

But perhaps what is more significant about the Joshua Bell story is what it says about context. The reason many people passed him by was because of context – they are in an underground station, which is an unpleasant place to be, and want to get out of it as fast as possible because they are probably on their way somewhere and want to be punctual or because they're not expecting to encounter classical music there and so have a different mindset in place and so on.

Big OER is often found in a specific repository and people have come to that site with the intention of learning. It is placed within an educational context. Little OER is often placed on third-party services which will contain a range of content and people may not have learning as their goal when encountering these resources. This may mean that a different audience is reached, but it may also result in any educational intention in the content being misconstrued or missed.

The importance of educational context was one outcome in a project I ran recently. In the podstars project I mentioned in Chapter 7 (Weller 2010) academics used Flip cameras and other tools to start producing multimedia content. They uploaded their content to YouTube and to a wiki. As one of the contributors commented,

No amount of creativity in the making of an artefact will compensate for the absence of a framework within which to disseminate it. My Facebook postings (of links to my 2 videos) received brief comments from 3 of my 67 'friends'. Nothing on Twitter or Youtube. This demotivated me to continue investing the time. If I'd had, say, a teaching forum with students working on intercultural semiotics, I'd have had more of an impact.

As was suggested above, little OER encourages aggregation and through this, the creation of context. While this offers greater flexibility, it also requires greater effort, whereas the educational context of big OERs is inherent in both their location and their content.

Open courses

As well as open educational content, a number of educators have begun to explore the possibility of running courses entirely in the open. These are sometimes labelled MOOCs (Massively Open Online Courses). David Wiley, Alec Couros and Jim

Groom have all experimented with versions of open courses, but it is probably Stephen Downes and George Siemens' 'Connectivism and Connected Knowledge' courses, which have run annually since 2008, that are most representative. McAuley *et al.* (2010) suggest that a MOOC

integrates the connectivity of social networking, the facilitation of an acknowledged expert in a field of study, and a collection of freely accessible online resources. Perhaps most importantly, however, a MOOC builds on the active engagement of several hundred to several thousand 'students' who self-organize their participation according to learning goals, prior knowledge and skills, and common interests. Although it may share in some of the conventions of an ordinary course, such as a predefined timeline and weekly topics for consideration, a MOOC generally carries no fees, no prerequisites other than Internet access and interest, no predefined expectations for participation, and no formal accreditation.

Models of open courses vary; some are created solely as open courses, with no associated accreditation; others combine fee-paying students, often on campus who are studying for credit, with those taking the course online purely for interest.

Completion rates are an issue for MOOCs, where the motivation and commitment to continue is not as great for those taking the course out of interest and who will not be assessed. However, as McAuley *et al.* (2010) argue, 'completion of all course assignments is neither necessary nor the goal of every student', so this may not be significant. As with OERs, sustainability and the impact upon a university's core business are also topics of interest, as it is not yet fully understood whether such courses act as recruitment vehicles for fee-paying students or result in a drop in student enrolment. There are, of course, many other reasons why courses may be delivered in the open, but their sustainability within a conventional university structure is likely to be the deciding factor for broader adoption.

Conclusion

In this chapter the nature of openness in education has been explored, particularly as it relates to content and courses. The categorisation of educational resources, as big and little, provides a lens on some of the issues and uses of the open education movement. One key difference is that of intentionality, where big OERs are created for the specific purpose of learning, whereas little OERs may be created from a variety of motivations but can have an educational intention ascribed to them by someone else.

There are significant differences between the way in which these types of OERs are used and interpreted by audiences, which relate to quality, reputation and ease

of production. It may well be that a 'mixed economy' of both types of OERs is the best route to realising open education. Big OER is a useful means of raising the profile of open education and an initial way of approaching reuse that overcomes many of the objections based on quality and reliability. Little OER represents a more dynamic model that encourages participation and may be more sustainable. For learners, a mixture of both may also create a varied, engaging experience.

Open courses represent the type of experimentation and model that has been seen in other industries, as discussed in Chapter 3. Both OERs and open courses are a direct response to the challenges and opportunities of a digital, networked, open approach in education. They may not be the solutions in themselves, and maybe several years from now they will be superseded, but they can be interpreted as generating feedback and experimenting with possibilities and alternatives that were previously unavailable. It is the generation of alternatives that will be explored in more detail in Chapter 10 and particularly how this relates to another significant scholarly practice, the academic conference.