

Researching Open Content for Education: Editorial

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Editorial

Just as open source has had a huge impact on the software we use, the open content approach to releasing material and tools for free use offers great potential for the way we educate. Open Educational Resources (OER) from universities have grown in importance through the action of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in its eight year programme to support projects and initiatives across the world. As the field has developed and significant investment is now planned by organizations and other funders it is clear that there is a need to reflect on results and report on research actions. This special issue of the Journal of Interactive Media in Education (JIME) builds from selected papers from the OpenLearn2007 conference [1] where researchers were invited to report on their research across themes of software and tools, user experience, sustainability and the research agenda in open content in education. The papers published in this issue cover each of these themes.

Software and tools have emerged as an important element to try to provide an open environment for learners. Three papers report on tools offered through OpenLearn where each has been driven by different requirements and has raised different challenges. Little, Denham and Eisenstadt review the role that presence can play and the experience of developing a tool that combines presence with messaging. Tomadaki, Quick and Scott look at the use of free and instant video-conferencing alongside open resources and provide a visual classification of the ways in which it has been adopted in the open community. Buckingham Shum and Okada look at the community building a cartography of shared knowledge that can help people move from consumer of resources to a role as a provider, bringing out the different patterns of map that have been produced by users of the Compendium tool.

Open content could change the experience of developing learning materials. Fulantelli, Gentile, Taibi and Allegri consider open resources as an evolution in the way educational material can be produced, presenting an overall model relating learning objects to open content and identifying potential benefits for the lifecycle of educational material if an open approach is more widely adopted. Conole and Weller also consider the teachers' perspective in terms of how to design content to work in the open world and the sort of tools that would aid the learning designer. Mor and Winters look at a similar design process by representing designs as learning patterns that can be reinterpreted and describe a way in which they have used participation in workshops to elicit possible patterns. The learner experience is addressed more directly by Lovett, Meyer and Thille who provide evidence of the effectiveness of open learning resources that capture learner interactions and can accelerate the learning experience, gaining efficiency as well as effectiveness.

Two papers look at the way in which open resources can be applied in Africa. Issues of how to sustain and replicate work that was carried out in a project supporting teachers using open resources in Africa are explored by Wolfenden leading to four key issues that impacted on the success of the project. Petrides and Jimes found that creating a community of contributors was a key component in their work developing the concept of free text books built from open resources and localized for use in Africa.

Three papers consider research approaches and direction. van der Baaren, Schuwer, Kirschner and Hendriks consider how in the future users may participate in open environments and work back from those scenarios to consider the research challenges and experiments we need to address now. The way

in which research should be conducted is also considered by Lawler, who reviews action research as an appropriate approach for 'the wiki way' and applies it in reviewing work on the Wikiversity. While the benefits from open content and OER are being revealed through much of the research reported in this issue, Santos explains how the claims and motivations for the work are not yet fully established and applies Critical Discourse Analysis to the public statements from initiatives to highlight the need to be clearer about how to deliver actions for global rather than local benefit.

This collection of papers shows just some of the diversity of work in OER community and shows the value of reflecting and reporting the research activity alongside the development of practical and useful ways to share educational resources.

Papers in the special issue

van der Baaren, J., Schuwer, R., Kirschner, P., and Hendriks, M. (2008). Finding your way into an open online learning community. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/04/>

Conole, G. and Weller, M. (2008). Using learning design as a framework for supporting the design and reuse of OER. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/05/>

Fulantelli, G., Gentile, M., Taibi, D., and Allegra, M. (2008). The Open Learning Object model to promote Open Educational Resources. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/09/>

Lawler, C. (2008). Action research as a congruent methodology for understanding wikis: the case of Wikiversity. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/06/>

Little, A., Denham, C., and Eisenstadt, M. (2008). MSG Instant Messenger: Social Presence and Location for the "Ad Hoc Learning Experience". *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/02/>

Lovett, M., Meyer, O., and Thille, C. (2008). The Open Learning Initiative: Measuring the Effectiveness of the OLI Statistics Course in Accelerating Student Learning. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/14/>

Mor, Y. and Winters, N. (2008). Participatory design in open education: a workshop model for developing a pattern language. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/13/>

Petrides, L. and Jimes, C. (2008). Building Open Educational Resources from the Ground Up: South Africa's Free High School Science Texts. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/07/>

Santos, A. (2008). The Discourses of OERs: how flat is this world? *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/11/>

Shum, S.B. and Okada, A. (2008). Knowledge Cartography for Open Sensemaking Communities. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/10/>

Tomadaki, E., Quick, K.A., and Scott, P.J. (2008). Videoconferencing in Open Learning. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/08/>

Wolfenden, F. (2008). The TESSA OER Experience: Building sustainable models of production and user implementation. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <http://jime.open.ac.uk/2008/03/>

[1] Abstracts and recordings from the OpenLearn conference can be found via <http://www.open.ac.uk/openlearn/openlearn2007/>