Realising the Open in Open Educational Resources: Practical Concerns and Solutions

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Introduction: The History of Open Licensing

The term "Open Educational Resources" was first adopted at the 2002 UNESCO "Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries," sponsored by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The term was defined as "the open provision of educational resources, enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes" (UNESCO 2002, p. 24).

This definition and its emphasis on open availability and non-commercial use remains central in the way the term is understood, used and also discussed (and at times disputed) in the current context. The key is that these resources, unlike previous attempts to create collections of reusable resources and communities of users (e.g., Roschelle and Kaput 1996), are to be available under licensing that is *different* from conventional copyright, and also that it is not to be encumbered by digital rights management or other mechanisms for enforcing licensing restrictions.

The term "openness," however, can be understood in a wide variety of ways. In the context of open software and content in particular, openness has been characterised and defined in different ways. As early as 1986, Richard Stallman, founder of the Free Software Foundation, emphasised the importance of being able to have the ability to "copy," "distribute" and "improve" software, and to be able to "exchange the changes with others" (Stallman 1986, p. 8). These four abilities, or "freedoms" (copying, distribution, changing and distribution of changes), have become a central part of the notion of openness in connection with content generally and Open Educational Resources (OER) in particular. One frequently referenced set of criteria for the area of content echoes Stallman's

criteria, and is referred to as the "4Rs Framework" by David Wiley. It outlines the "primary permissions or usage rights open content" as follows (Wiley 2009, 2011; WikiEducator 2011a):

1. Re-use – the right to re-use the content in its unaltered/verbatim form (e.g., make a back-up copy of the content)

2. Revise – the right to adapt, adjust, modify or alter the content itself (e.g., translate the content into another language)

3. Remix – the right to combine the original or revised content with other content to create something new (e.g., incorporate the content into a mashup)

4. Redistribute – the right to share copies of the original content, your revisions or your remixes with others (e.g., give a copy of the content to a friend)

This and other articulations of openness and freedom, applying to both technical and creative works, have been given legal force and definition through a range of licences that have been developed since the 1980s. As Stallman's four freedoms indicate, these licences first emerged as informal practices of copying, changing and distributing short programmes in print (and other forms). They then proliferated and the label "copyleft" emerged — more as a general philosophy or approach than a specific solution — to describe the approach to intellectual property associated with them.

As the name suggests, copyleft goes slightly further than simply recognising Stallman's four freedoms. Instead of simply modifying or lifting copyright restrictions to enable revision and (re)distribution, copyleft seeks to emphatically invert these restrictions. Instead of declaring "all rights *reserved*," the idea was (and is) to have "all rights *reversed*:" to *require* that the software be openly available, regardless of how it might be modified or put to use, sometimes referred to as enforcing "symmetric collaboration" (WikiEducator 2011b).

Attempts to formalise these practices in different contexts and for different software projects led to a range of permutations, and applications eventually led to the proliferation of a range of types of licences. These include, for example, the Open BSD and GNU General Public License (BSD and GNU being software and operating system projects), the Apache licence (Apache being popular Web server software) and the Sun Public License (formulated for a computer company later to become a part of Oracle). In fact, the not-for-profit "Open Source Initiative" lists 69 different "open source licences" that meet their specific criteria of "open source" specifically for software. They include licences for special purposes such as for fonts, and others that can only be used by the authors of the original licence (for more information, see www.opensource.org/licenses/category and www.gnu.org/licenses/license-list.html).

These different licences reflect the different interests of their originators, ranging from hobbyists and hackers to academics and entrepreneurs. This is particularly captured in the question of requiring derivatives to be shared as the original. The MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and Apache licences allow software to be revised and then redistributed without restriction, while the GNU General Public License (not to be confused with the lesser GNU Public License) does not. The latter very explicitly forbids the redistribution of modified software under any

terms other than those of the same licence, a requirement that is subsequently carried to all subsequent derivative works.

The issue of combined revision and equitable redistribution (or the requirement of "symmetric collaboration") needs to be highlighted because it has become contentious in defining the notion of open and free, as they relate both to software and to other intellectual and creative works. For example, this type of licensing has been derisively described as viral or even as "a cancer that attaches itself in an intellectual property sense to everything it touches" (Steve Ballmer, as quoted in Newbart 2001). Adding a relatively minor copyleft component (e.g., a software module or an illustration) to a substantial copyright-protected work (e.g., an operating system or a course module) can have the effect of changing the more substantial work from being "copyright" to "copyleft." Through a small addition or remix, an entire software system or course would now have to be made available *without* restrictions on its further distribution and revision.

A similar diversity of licences for educational and other works has also become manifest outside the world of software and operating systems. Development of alternative licences for material *other* than software began at the turn of the millennium, beginning with the OCL (Open Content License) developed by David Wiley in 1998 (Wiley 1998) with assistance from Richard Stallman. Many other licences followed for Web content and initiatives for facilitating access to and use of these contents. These include the GNU Free Documentation License (GNU FDL, initially developed for documentation in the GNU project in 2000); the Open Directory Project License (2010); the Open Publication License (2007); and the Creative Commons licences (2002).

Creative Commons: Four Licensing Options and Tools

It is the Creative Commons licences that are the most widely used in online collections of learning resources: 95 of 107 collections using standard licences used one or more (or a customization of) Creative Commons licences, according a recent Hewlett Foundation study (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation 2008).

The Creative Commons licences also take a notably different approach from many other efforts. Instead of attempting to completely remove or reverse copyright restrictions, the Creative Commons approach is to keep "some rights reserved" through a voluntary selection of licences with different types and levels of restriction. As Wang (2004, pp. 305–306) explains:

> "Creative Commons [(CC) has] established a flexible copyright implementing model, the 'some rights reserved' model ... which values innovation and protection equally. CC licenses change the traditional mandatory rights assertion into a voluntary, optional rights approach."

These licences, along with what Creative Commons has characterised as the CC0 and the "public domain mark," constitute the focus of the remainder of this chapter. These licences have been developed by a non-profit organisation of the same name, founded by law professor Lawrence Lessig, with the ambitious mission of realising "the full potential of the Internet — universal access to research and education, [and] full participation in culture" (Creative Commons 2011).

In keeping with this ambition, the six Creative Commons licences have been made as easy as possible to understand, choose and apply to a work. As the Creative Commons homepage explains:

> "Licensing a work is as simple as selecting which of the six licenses best meets your goals, and then marking your work in some way so that others know that you have chosen to release the work under the terms of that license."

As one member of the "open culture" movement describes it (Möller 2007), the announcement of these licences has been perceived as an enormous boon for those wishing to make their work freely available:

> "When the Creative Commons project published its first licenses in December 2002, it finally brought a sense of unity to the free culture movement. Instead of having to choose from many scattered licenses, creators now have the option to pick the right license for their work using a simple tool."

Others have been similarly complimentary: "It's got to be CC [Creative Commons] or we're not using it. Because that just removes all the complexities" (strategist, as quoted in "OERs: The Value of Reuse in Higher Education" (Talis Aspire 2011). As this chapter will show, it is unfortunately not quite that simple.

All of the six Creative Commons licences require that the creator of the original work or content be attributed, and this is the *only* requirement of the most simple of these licences, the "attribution" (or CC BY) licence. The question is how to adequately attribute a work in compliance with this licence, as when attributing a piece of material via a name or a citation is a matter of convention and differs from one context and medium to another. The Creative Commons website provides some best practices, as does a document available from the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (ARCCECII 2009), but these are recommendations only.

Combined with attribution (BY), other restrictions or requirements articulated in Creative Commons licences are as follows:

- CC-BY-NC [non-commercial]: Requires the content to be used only in non-commercial contexts and for non-commercial purposes.

- CC-BY-ND [no derivatives]: Restricts modification of the content or the creation of derivative works from it.

- CC-BY-SA [share alike]: Requires subsequent users to license derivative works under the same terms as the original.

Further logical combinations of these requirements constitute the remainder of the six Creative Commons licences, which combine the non commercial and share-alike restrictions (CC-BY-NC-SA), and the no derivatives and non-commercial restrictions (CC-BY-NC-ND).

In addition to these licences and the tools to choose between and assign them, Creative Commons has more recently provided two further ways of making works available: The CC0 (CC-zero) licence, which, as the initiative explains (2011), allows:

> "creators and owners of copyright- or database-protected content to waive those interests in their works and thereby place them as

completely as possible in the public domain, so that others may freely build upon, enhance and reuse the works for any purposes without restriction under copyright or database law."

The CC0 provides the most complete and broadly applicable way of dedicating one's own work to the public domain — a process which, as the Creative Commons text points out, "few if any jurisdictions ... [provide] a process for doing ... easily and reliably."

The second option represents a variation on this: It is a "mark" for declaring works by third parties as being in the public domain. "The Public Domain Mark operates as a tag or a label, allowing institutions like [museums and libraries] ... with such knowledge to communicate that a work is no longer restricted by copyright and can be freely used by others" (Creative Commons 2011).

The public domain mark is used, for example, by Wikipedia to label photographs of original visual art works, where the original is in the public domain. It would also apply to digitised texts copyrighted prior to 1923, which are thus in the public domain (with a few exceptions; http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/okbooks.html).

Practical Concerns

Practical Concern 1: The Non-Commercial (NC) Restriction

Like the restriction to attribute a work, almost all of the other restrictions specified in the Creative Commons licences here raise some practical concerns, questions and, sometimes, criticisms.

One licensing category that has been the source of some controversy is the NC restriction, which forbids the use or redistribution of a resource "in any manner that is primarily intended for or directed toward commercial advantage or private monetary compensation" (Creative Commons 2011). A resource bearing such a licence cannot appear on a webpage that has commercial advertising or in a journal that requires subscription. Möller (2007) has pointed out that:

> "Many bloggers and blog communities on the web use advertising as a way to recoup costs and generate income.... [Their] publications often use Google Ads to make some extra money. Other sites use small-scale subscription models to unlock additional features and content or disable advertising.... Compilations which are sold are another example of commercial use. For example, if one MP3 music file which is licensed for non-commercial use only is included among thousands on a DVD collecting free music and sold for a small personal profit, that is a violation of the license."

Möller argues that the NC restriction also "effectively support[s] the existing, extremely [restrictive] ... international copyright terms," which prevent a work from being used for commercial purposes for 70 years after the authors' death.

In addition, it is worth noting that nearly half of the 107 collections listed in the 2008 William and Flora Hewlett Foundation study that use standard Creative Commons licences require this non-commercial restriction. At the same time, public educational organisations are frequently classified as being not for profit. As such, their purposes are not strictly commercial or oriented towards "private

monetary compensation." Thus, even when those organisations charge tuition and fees for other services, the use of OER is considered to be non-commercial.

Practical Concern 2: Compatibility Between Licences

A second issue of importance for distance and open education organisations and others wishing to use or create Creative Commons licensed content is the matter of the compatibility between different licences. Content licensed under one Creative Commons licence cannot necessarily be combined or remixed with a resource bearing a different Creative Commons licence. For example, the non-commercial restriction, as Möller noted, does not work particularly well with licences that do not impose the same restriction. For example, material with the NC restriction could not be incorporated on a page that contains other open material along with a set of Google AdWords. Highlighting specifically the incompatibility of the non-commercial with the share-alike restriction, Möller (2007) explains:

> "You can make derivative works, but they have to be licensed under the same terms. You cannot make a derivative work through addition of -NC content, as you can no longer apply the (more liberal) 'share-alike' license to the entire work. This is true even for Creative Commons' own licenses: You cannot combine, for example, BY-SA content with BY-NC-SA content."

Since revising material, remixing it and then redistributing it covers three of Wiley's four criteria for "open" content, incompatibilities of these kinds are significant, and are considered in some detail here. (Note that problems with licence incapability, such as between the BSD and the GNU licences, existed well before the introduction of the tools and resources of Creative Commons.) As a table included in the Creative Commons FAQ indicates, there are no fewer than 25 incompatibilities out of a possible 36 combinations of their six licences (Creative Commons 2012). (Indeed, such a licence incapability, between the BY licence of Creative Commons and the BY-NC-ND licence of the publisher of this collection would prevent me from reproducing this same table here.)

What is more important, though, is the potential limitation on revision and re-use presented by the presence of licence incompatibilities between collections of resources. As indicated earlier, the majority of OER and resource collections use licences from Creative Commons. However, the Creative Commons licences that they use vary considerably. Resources from Connexions, a popular collection of Rice University, have a relatively open BY licence, and can be recombined with resources from any of the other collections. However, it is the very openness of this licence that sometimes prevents the incorporation of resources with different licences. In other words, a relatively small Connexions resource could not be permissibly combined with a larger resource with a more restrictive licence; and any combination of a Connexions resource with a differently licensed resource could not then be housed in a collection using more restrictive licensing terms.

Translating the licence types into different, well-known OER collections shows that fully half (15 of 30) of the possible combinations of resources from the different collections listed in Table 6.1 (and from collections with the same licences) are not permissible. The ones that readily allow for combinations and

remixing, and the collection and redistribution of such resources, are those that impose the least restriction. In addition, it is important to note that the public domain and CC0 options, as shown in Table 6.1, allow for nearly the same flexibility as the Creative Commons BY licence.

Table 6.1: Compatibility of resources for remixing, by collection

An OER from one of these collections (or with one of these licences):	... can or cannot be remixed and redistributed with one from ...				
	Connexions BY	EduTools BY-NC	JISC BY-NC-ND	MIT Courseware BY-NC-SA	WikiEducator BY-SA
Public Domain, CC0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Connexions, BY	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EduTools, BY-NC	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
JISC, BY-NC	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
MIT Courseware, BY-NC	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Commonwealth of Learning	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓

It is not surprising, then, that the recent study from the Hewlett Foundation from which this data is taken concludes: "The terms of different licenses are often incompatible with one another in a way that prevents combining materials from different providers" (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation 2008, p. 13).

Practical Concern 3: Share-Alike

As indicated above, one Creative Commons restriction (and variations of it in other licences) is of particular concern for open and distance educations organisations, especially those with a legacy of content. This is the "symmetrical collaboration" or "share-alike" restriction. It allows subsequent users to "alter, transform, or build upon [the] work," but only under the condition that "the resulting work ... [may be distributed] only under the same, similar or a compatible license."

This is clearly one of the most popular types of Creative Commons licences. It is used by Wikipedia and its sister projects and is assigned to about 45 million photos on Flickr. And 46 out of 105 projects listed by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation use a licence with this restriction. This share-alike restriction means that the inclusion of a relatively minor addition to a work that bears the "SA" requirement, such as a photo or audio clip in a course module, would need to be "shared alike." This means the resource has to be explicitly described as being free not only of legal restrictions, but also of unnecessary technological barriers to access — for example, being distributed in a PDF format that does not allow for editing and other operations. (So, a restriction might state: "You may not Use the Work with any technological measures that control access or use of the Work in a manner inconsistent with the terms of this License Agreement.") This presents obvious difficulties related to branding, quality assurance and the overall business model of some

educational institutions. For example, work under this licence could not be used by an organisation that requires students to log on (say, to a learning management system like Moodle) to access course materials, unless it is also shared alike in both legal and technical terms. It would present problems to a similar organisation wishing to control how and when its materials work under this licence and branding appear and are circulated in public. Additionally, it presents challenges for publishers and distributors of content whose business model is based on the limited availability of such content.

It is therefore not surprising that the share-alike restriction has also been the subject of much debate, as indicated by blog articles (e.g., Blackall 2007) and online debates (e.g., WikiEducator 2007).

Still, this share-alike provision is not absolute or unconditional, and the extended legal documentation that constitutes both the Canadian and U.S. versions of this licence identifies an important set of exceptions that may be of some importance to open and distance education organisations. These are the exceptions provided by the definition of "collective work" in the licence. Such a collective or aggregate creation is defined in this text in relation to a given resource (the "work") licensed under this Creative Commons provision (Attribution-ShareAlike 2.5 Canada 2009):

> "'Collective Work' means a work, such as a dictionary, yearbook, encyclopedia, or a newspaper, review magazine or singular periodical and any work written in distinct parts by different authors, or in which works or parts of works of different authors are incorporated. A work that constitutes a Collective Work will not be considered a Derivative Work (as defined below) for the purposes of this license."

This definition presents the collective work, in other words, as a kind of aggregate work that is exempt from the "viral" characteristic of copyleft. A resource with a Creative Commons Share-Alike licence can be "incorporated" into a collective work (such as a review magazine or singular periodical) without the resulting aggregation being seen simply as a "derivative work" and as subject as a whole to copyleft. The Creative Commons licence FAQ provides other examples of collective works, including anthologies and broadcasts.

This exception is made in the case of works that can be seen to be aggregations of multiple contributions, with each contribution (in the words of the American licence) "constituting [a] separate and independent" work in itself.

Given the wording of these provisions and examples, it is possible to draw conclusions about a number of types of resources and forms of resource integration that are likely to fit with the quality concerns and business model of many distance and open learning organisations. A number of types of combinations of copyleft and (conventional) copyright resources — and the kind of collective work that they would constitute together — are listed in Table 6.2. The first three rows provide examples of copyleft resources that could be used together with resources bearing other licences (including unmodified copyright restrictions) to constitute a collective work that would be for the exclusive use of a single organisation. The second two rows provide examples of resources for which it is *difficult to be certain* about the status of other resource types and their

combinations on other kinds of collective works. And the three bottom rows provide examples of combinations with share-alike resources that would not be permissible under any circumstances.

Table 6.2: Combinations of educational works likely to constitute a non-public collective work

	Copyleft resource	Copyright resources	Collective work incorporating both
Combinations acceptable for use by a single organisation	Textbook (e.g., from textbookrevolution.org)	Online course resources or a "course manual"	"Course" constituted through the provision of the two resources.
	Article (e.g., from DOAJ)	Other articles/readings	Readings associated with course
	Video or audio podcast[a]	Other multimedia resources	Bibliography of multimedia resources for course
Combinations in which the status of some resource types is uncertain	Podcast on iTunes University (accessed via iTunes)	Course manual instructing students to access iTunes podcasts	Integrated course resource requiring the use of other resources
	Collection of resources (e.g., merlot.org)	Integrated course resource online referencing specific resources in the copyleft collection	Integrated course resource requiring the use of other resources
Combinations not permissable under any circumstances	Interactive resource (e.g., simulation from merlot.org)	Specific exercises for the use of the simulation	Fully integrated course manual or other kind of resource
	Photograph from Flickr or diagram from Wikipedia	Text referencing photo or diagram and its particular contents	Fully integrated course manual or other kind of resource
	Video or audio podcast (e.g., clip from YouTube EDU)	Webpage from course materials that directly embeds YouTube player and clip, and adds contextualising text	Password-protected Web (HTML) documents constituting course materials

a   The effective limitation of the collective work to "written works" in the Canadian version of the licence casts the viability of this last example into some doubt where "Canadian" resources referencing this licence are concerned. Note that such a limitation (to text and writing) is *not* present in the American licence.

It is important to note that, based on these sets of resource combinations, types of resources and forms of integration are of paramount importance. As long as resources licensed under the share-alike provision are unmodified and otherwise retain their integrity as individual works, they can be brought together with other materials in Collective Works.

Conclusion

Although the implications of the practical considerations discussed here are complex and manifold, there are some fairly simple conclusions and recommendations that can be formulated for OER collectors, developers and others in open and distance education institutions.

First, in investing in OER, whether as a creator, collector or institution, it is important to recognise that licences have far more implications than what might initially appear the case. The NC restriction is a good example. This restriction can prevent all kinds of use within the public and not-for-profit sectors or contexts, as well as in the for-profit sector. Many of these uses would not be immediately

recognisable to creators or others who would be inclined to label their resource with this licence.

Second, concerning the complex issue of compatibility between licences, the situation is best summed up in "you get as good as you give" or "what goes around comes around." Collections, designs and individual resources with more open terms of use will be more flexible in terms of what they can incorporate. The more restrictive the licence chosen in connection with OER, the more limited the possibilities for the resource and the collection bearing that licence.

These points are particularly important to keep in mind in light of the original intention behind OER. In their final declaration, the participants in the UNESCO forum expressed their "wish to develop together a universal educational resource available for the whole of humanity to be referred to henceforth as Open Educational Resources" (2002, p. 6). They contextualised this ambitious aspiration by comparing their vision to UNESCO's existing programme for the identification and preservation of "cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity" (UNESCO 2009): "Following the example of the World Heritage of Humanity, preserved by UNESCO, [we] hope that this open resource for the future mobilises the whole of the worldwide community of educators" (UNESCO 2002, p. 28). Such a resource would undoubtedly have this mobilising potential, but for this value to be realised, the worldwide community of educators needs to be willing to collaborate on terms that are as open and flexible as possible.

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