

The dimensions of being open: What does open educational practices look like in Australia?

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Based on the concept of a continuum of openness, this session will respond to the Australian contextualisation of Open Educational Practices (OEP) in higher education, and openness more broadly within different institutions. This will be undertaken through brief cases of implementation at the panellists' institutions, with an invitation to the audience to expand, and contribute to, the ongoing Australian OEP dialogue. The complexity, considerations for engagement, and practical examples will be considered to catalyse discussion with the audience. The panel will also discuss possible challenges facing practitioners and their institutions, and opportunities to explore future directions, as well as the roles the OEP SIG, as part of the ASCILITE community, could play in progressing and nurturing OEP developments in Australia.

Keywords: Open Educational Practice, Open Educational Practice in Australia, Open Educational Resources, Learning & Teaching, Educational technology, Continuum of openness, Dimensions of openness in Australia.

Open Education Practices in Australia

According to Cronin (2017), Open Educational Practices (OEP) represent “collaborative practices that include the creation, use, and reuse of Open Educational Resources (OER), as well as pedagogical practices employing participatory technologies and social networks for interaction, peer-learning, knowledge creation, and empowerment of learners” (p. 18). There are several reasons why OEP has been attracting attention from educational institutions, governments, learners and educators around the world. The growth of the open educational trend “is a response to the rising costs of education, the desire for accessing learning in areas where such access is difficult, and an expression of student choice about when and how to learn” (Johnson, Levine, Smith, & Stone, 2010, p. 6). Whilst the cost of higher education has focused international media attention, practitioners engage in many other ‘dimensions of being open’. These practices represent an emergent movement that is re-shaping learning and teaching in higher education worldwide, by supporting educational designs that lower barriers to higher education, reduce costs for students and faculty, catalyse authentic assessment practices with societal impact, and promote open access to knowledge and digital tools.

Despite gaining momentum worldwide, OEP initiatives and programs at higher education levels are still limited in Australia (Bossu & Stagg, 2018; Stagg et al., 2018). However, there are some important developments taking place. For example, at institutional levels, most Australian universities have an open access repository where thesis, research data and outputs from government funded projects and initiatives are made available, typically using open licenses, including Creative Commons licenses, for other researchers to use and re-use (Picasso & Phelan, 2014). Also, many institutions have developed capacity building programs and events in order to raise awareness and disseminate OEP internally (Stagg et al., 2018).

There have also been national level developments to engage a wide range of stakeholders with OEP. One recent development is the establishment of the Australian Open Educational Practice Special Interest Group (OEP SIG). This is a practitioner-facilitated community designed to bring open educators (primarily those in higher education) together to explore issues of common interest, collaborate on shared projects, undertake research, and to advocate for the place of OEP in national learning and teaching discussions, strategy, and policy. This is a ‘grassroots’ community, and engagement with OEP varies greatly across the membership (<https://oepoz.wordpress.com/>). This SIG is supported and sponsored by ASCILITE, which represents an important networking environment for this new OEP Community of Practice to flourish. ASCILITE as an institution represents the synergy between education and technology that is needed to truly push the OEP



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initiative forward. Whilst recognising that there is value in putting pedagogy before technology, it's clear that a major driver of the OEP practice is the ability of technology to make these resources available widely regardless of physical location or socio-economic factors. This panel will therefore discuss the value of OEP whilst also using the ASCILITE community as a platform to understand how education and technology can be intertwined to push the OEP initiative forward.

About the Panel

This interactive panel will explore key developments in OEP in Australia. The panel session will be chaired by Valerie Peachey (Professor - Open Education; Charles Sturt University) and will include panellists Julie Lindsay, Open Pathways Design Leader, Charles Sturt University; Michael Cowling, Senior Lecturer - Educational Technology, Central Queensland University; Carina Bossu, Adjunct Senior Lecturer, UTAS; and Adrian Stagg, Manager - Open Educational Practice, University of Southern Queensland.

Based on the concept of a continuum of openness, where the word “open” can have different meanings in different contexts and in practice it is a continuous (not binary) construct (Hilton, Wiley, Stein & Johnson, 2010), this session will respond to the local contextualisation of open educational practices, and openness more broadly at their institutions. The complexity, considerations for engagement, and practical outcomes will all be considered to catalyse discussion with the audience. It is recognised that members of the audience may already engage at different points across a continuum of openness, and thus have contributions to, and an evaluation of, the discussed examples. The panel will also welcome critiques and discussions considering the complexities of OEP at the various levels such as learners, educators, institutions and the sector.

In addition, this panel will also argue that despite technology providing us a massively connected world, for some reason curriculum is still hidden behind large barriers. It will be argued that the culture of technology and of openness needs to come forward and help inform the use of OEP, and that the ASCILITE community is the place to do this. Areas such as the use of proprietary software to achieve open goals, the challenges of sharing in a digital environment within higher education, and even concepts of sharing/access to course content and student-generated resources post-graduation will be discussed. Doing this allows for true “learning without borders”, because it equalises practice across the globe.

Finally, a way forward for the synergy of OEP will be discussed, with recommendations summarised for the OEP website. To this end, the audience will be engaged in discussion at different stages of the panel presentation. These discussions will invite participants to critically reflect on their current learning and teaching practices and how OEP can be useful to them and their institutions. In addition, the session will make use of a special Twitter hashtag (and other technologies) to encourage ASCILITE attendees to share their best practice, challenges and questions both before and during the session. Questions and issues raised in the Twitter feed will be discussed during the panel presentation, contributing to the discussion of a way forward in the space. In the vein of OEP, a recording of the session will also be made available on the SIG webpage (<https://oepoz.wordpress.com/>) for further discussion via social media, where it will be shared

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Please cite as: Bossu, C., Stagg, A., Cowling, M., Peachey, V. & Lindsay, J. (2018). The dimensions of being open: What does open educational practices look like in Australia? In M. Campbell, J. Willems, C. Adachi, D. Blake, I. Doherty, S. Krishnan, S. Macfarlane, L. Ngo, M. O'Donnell, S. Palmer, L. Riddell, I. Story, H. Suri & J. Tai (Eds.), *Open Oceans: Learning without borders*. Proceedings ASCILITE 2018 Geelong (pp. 552-554).