

OE Global Conference

OE Global 2016 Submission Proposal: Long Abstract

Intended audience (for example, experienced open education professionals, those new to the field, administrators, general)

TITLE of SESSION: Creative Destruction: An 'Open Textbook' disrupting personal and institutional praxis

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GOALS: To raise awareness of the challenges for Higher Education as universities engage lecturers in creating Open Education (OE) resources for their subject disciplines within the constraints of institutional beliefs and practices. To highlight the importance of flexible institutional support for individual lecturers who choose to become early adopters of Open Education in their practices for teaching and learning. To draw attention to the value for academics in embracing failure: to do so with honesty and openness creates opportunities for deep personal and institutional learning.

TOPICS: The author presents her personal experience as creator of an 'Open Textbook' for the arts couching this within broader university practices. Through the offering of a critical narrative the author, an experienced user of emerging technologies for teaching and learning, critically evaluates the parameters for creative and open practice within existing policies, procedures, and institutional beliefs and practices. This storied experience outlines the challenges, and also the rich benefits for learners, institutions and educators who embrace Open Education philosophies and practices.

Extended abstract

Introduction – territory, boundaries and transgression

Universities seeking to situate themselves as leading institutions in Open Education are challenged to balance competing imperatives. These include but are not limited to: the need to support unique innovation and knowledge generation while offering institutional protection of Intellectual Property; and the need to facilitate the co-construction and free-sharing of content and/as knowledge within existing policies, procedures, resourcing and support systems. Navigating across the borders and boundaries between those different imperatives, the author presents a personal and professional analysis of her experience during a one-year regional Australian university-funded teaching and learning initiative to create an Open Textbook. Presenting a critical narrative of her experience in the third space between personal and institutional frameworks and practices during the creation of an Open Textbook, the author explores the axiologies, power relationships and scope for growth within the larger institution.

Stephen Downes (2015) has emphasised for a decade the importance of a co-production model of OER development, where learners themselves become agents in analysing and creating learning objects for their individual and communal learning needs. Nevertheless, the institutional habitus or accepted practices of a university, its faculty and the individual academic still positions university rather than the learner as the creator and purveyor of content for learning: a position reinforced by government requirements for standardisation of curriculum, assessment and reporting and by external standards set

by professional bodies. The author, who has 20 years of experience in secondary and Further Education and 15 years' experience as a lecturer in Higher Education contexts, brings a critical focus to the impact of habitus upon the planning and delivering formal education more broadly and to the adoption of Open Education in particular. In doing so, she points to a growing mismatch between informal and social practices of deep learning as described by Tochon (2014) and the established structures and practices common to formal education in Higher Education contexts in Australia and in other national contexts. However, the author suggests that universities are not monolithic entities but rather that they are constituted by meshes of relationships wherein a range of habitual practices are evolving in response to changing beliefs and practices of individuals and groups within and outside learning institutions. These act as push and pull factors.

Push factors that inform this testing of traditional boundaries within universities include the expectations of learners, and also those of educators who have come to expect that content may be created, shared and questioned across digital networks. Contemporary learners and educators are increasingly aware of diverse means for creating, accessing and re-purposing content. Their experience of personal and informal learning is needs driven, contextual and rhizomatic. While these push factors have given rise to beliefs about how knowledge may be generated and shared in seemingly egalitarian ways it has also intensified arguments concerning the right to 'speak back' to power. This is particularly important in the face of institutional counter-narratives around quality and standards of teaching and learning products and practices, and in the context of universities' publishers', researchers', and artists' fears at the perceived risks created by a loss of ownership of Intellectual Property. Hence, issues around commercial ownership and renewed research funding have created a troubled and partial response to in universities to external and internal push factors.

This paper explores the territory of one Australian regional university project where academics from multiple disciplines were funded to create Open Textbooks for their subject areas. In that university, push factors have been matched by a growing 'pull' created by senior management and lecturers. In turn this has informed a move towards greater co-construction, sharing and re-purposing of knowledge as academics' growing experience of technology-supported blended practices of teaching and learning create a shift in beliefs and practices about what constitutes value, standards, and fitness for purpose. This has created a new dynamic where the limits of what can be done in terms of open learning, and how it may be done, are questioned.

Against this broad context of changing practices and access to information, there are also pull factors. Universities are challenged to become more social, communal, egalitarian and 'just in time' in their approach to content and knowledge generation. They are driven by external and internal change, and competition to be seen as innovative, egalitarian and responsive. They are also faced with competing models and practices of production: peer reviewed repositories such as Wikipedia and Wikimedia allow rapid curation and re-publishing of print and e-books through a range of formats and services such as Wikibooks, WordPress and GitBook. Universities are confronted by light and swift models where authorial control, rapid turnaround and 'on the move' processes of re-editing not only challenge concepts of quality, value, and longevity but also the means by which expert knowledge has been shared in formal education: the static course and the textbook. A performance by choreographer Odedra (2015) offers a metaphor for this process and it is employed in this paper to model the fragmented book

and to show the creative force of 'seeming' destruction that occurred during the author's experience of creating an 'Open Textbook'.

There is resistance against push and pull factors, however. Universities as institutions have evolved in response to the needs of economically and intellectually divided societies: their remit is to privilege and support the generation of new discoveries, and to create spaces where existing knowledge may be benchmarked, then shared by experts to neophytes whose understanding and growth on the journey to expert knowledge is tested and rewarded. However, by tradition the power and perceived value of a university has rested upon its claims to Intellectual Property in the form of the unique contribution to knowledge that is made by the researchers and creatives whom it employs. That knowledge has been jealously guarded by universities, so that their institutional process and habits are structured by policies and procedures developed to protect the creation of knowledge artefacts and the conditions under which they may be disseminated to a broader community. The economic survival of universities rests upon its funding for paid publications, upon its reputation for a unique and competitive contribution to knowledge and upon the readiness of students to pay fees for undertaking study at that institution.

Hence, 21st century university governance carries with it the values and practices that strive to protect the Intellectual Property of its assets: talented researchers and educators are a resource critical to the university's positioning in the market. Striving to facilitate greater access to its core products and value, the university as an institution has an uneasy fit with 21st century practices of generating, mixing and mashing content. In response to these changing contexts and priorities, universities seeking to position themselves at the forefront of innovation have drawn upon the creative endeavours of their experts to offer Open Courseware, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS).

The Study Context

In 2015 a teaching and learning initiative engaged a small number of academics and researchers at a multi-site regional university in Australia in the creation of Open Textbooks in response to reports from the United States that student concerns that the cost of textbooks has a negative impact upon their learning experience in higher education (Senack, 2014, p.4). The university has a strong record of innovation in open learning: it was a founding partner of the Open Educational Resources Universitas (OERu) group. Since 2007 when ten courses were made available, it has provided open access to course content within the MIT Open Courseware Consortium (later to become the Open Education Consortium). With 15 years' experience of large-scale and fully accredited online course and program offerings across a range of disciplines, the university's support of digital course content includes the use of a Learning Object Repository (LOR) which allows the repurposing, licencing and sharing of learning objects by academics and with agreed partners. However, this is not an open resource.

The author of this paper is a Senior Lecturer in the arts and literacies for pre-service teacher education in a regional university in Queensland. Her initial proposal was to create a curriculum resource in response to Australia's secondary curriculum for the arts. An early adopter of technologies, her experience in the corporate sector during the 'dot com' boom of 1998 - 2005 had given her substantial experience and knowledge of policies and procedures, quality processes, and change-management as she supported universities in the transition to online and blended delivery. The author's proposal to

create an Open Textbook for the Arts focused upon the Australian curriculum strands of drama, dance, media (film), music and visual arts and also included Creative Writing. However, eschewing the static content-driven textbook format, she elected instead to create a Wordpress site with a strong transnational and community focus, with the intent that it would be created by students and artists. The voices of contributors and their diverse arts practices would extend beyond those of a traditional textbook. The site incorporated the research of pre-service teachers with Creative Commons Share-alike licenses allowing works to be re-purposed. However, like most early adopters the author's knowledge of technologies was sufficient to allow her to explore beyond the limits of her skill to resolve technical issues that arose: when her newly created site was hacked this caused problems that are the focus of this paper's discussion of the need for institutional support. An artist, writer and film-maker, the author's skills and knowledge of using technologies had been gained through naturalistic and informal styles of learning rather than formal education: while this informs her focus upon learning as a social and communal process, it also points to challenges for institutional support of early adopters.

Institutional habitus informs upon the ways in which Open Education projects may be imagined, managed and delivered. University and legislative frameworks impact upon the finance and reporting timeframes; technical support for non-standard software and non-university sites may be limited; teaching timelines may conflict with project management. Moreover, different beliefs between management and funding bodies and early adopter academics regarding what constitutes a 'textbook' in form and authorship may threaten to derail projects.

Confronted with the near failure of her Open Education project, the author concludes on a positive note: a shift in thinking allowed her to embrace the impact of destruction as part of the creative process. A book may take many forms.

References

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