

OER and Open Education. Introduction to selected papers

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For a third consecutive year, Open Praxis has partnered with the Open Education Consortium for the publication of selected papers among those presented in the last Open Education Global Conference, which took place in Kraków (Poland) from the 12th to 14th of April 2016. Following a collaboration that led to the publication of special issues in 2014 ([vol. 6 issue 2](#)) and 2015 ([vol. 7 issue 2](#)), in this occasion the issue collects 8 selected papers.

As stated in the conference website (<http://conference.oeconsortium.org/2016/about-oe-global-2016/>),

The Open Education Global Conference is the annual opportunity for researchers, practitioners, policy makers and educators to deeply explore open education and its impact on global education.

Conference participants learn from thought leaders in open education and have the opportunity to share ideas, practices and discuss issues important to the future of education worldwide. Sessions cover new developments in open education, research results, innovative technology, policy development and implementation, and practical solutions to challenges facing education around the world.

The theme of the conference in 2016 was *Convergence Through Collaboration*, and it featured various tracks, such as integration of open practices, collaboration, open education as strategy, or research to advance open education. The selected contributions relate to these topics and present either research results or innovative practice case studies. Among the diverse issues that the papers cover, we can group them into three main focuses:

- A critical concern with various *dimensions* of open research, addressed in the first two selected papers.
- Relevant examples of *regional and institutional experiences* supporting and promoting open education, presented in the next four papers.
- Experiences of OER addressed to *specific populations*, teachers and women in developing countries respectively, seeking their empowerment through the use of OER, analysed in the last two papers.

Papers submitted for publication in *Open Praxis* have followed a separate review process. The Open Education Global Conference 2016 Programme Committee first reviewed submissions for inclusion in the conference; those accepted for presentation and best rated by the committee were then recommended to *Open Praxis* for peer review and possible inclusion in this issue. The papers followed the usual submission guidelines in *Open Praxis* (i.e. double-blind peer review by two reviewers); additional revisions were requested during the peer review process, and finally eight papers were accepted for publication.

Thomas William King, Cheryl-Ann Hodgkinson-Williams, Michelle Willmers and Sukaina Walji, from Cape Town University in South Africa (*Dimensions of open research: critical reflections on openness in the ROER4D project*), with a concern on favouring coherence between open ideology and open practice, take ROER4D as a case study to reflect upon four dimensions of openness and exemplify how they approach them to undertake iterative open research. Ideological, legal,

technical and operational openness are systematically analyzed in the paper, applied to ROER4D. The paper is an invitation to develop open research and hold a critical approach. ROER4D was one of the winners of the Open Education Consortium 2016 Project awards, in the category “Open Research”.

Robert Farrow, from The Open University (United Kingdom), presents *A Framework for the Ethics of Open Education*. The ethical dimension in educational research and the implications of open data in research are discussed. The author presents a framework for thinking through ethical issues in contexts where openness is emphasized and/or without institutional support. The frame, which includes three positions within the normative theory (deontological, consequentialist and virtue ethics), is then applied to analyse the case of the OER Research Hub project. As the previous paper, this one is also an invitation to other researchers, in this case to incorporate the ethical dimension “in the open”.

After those first two papers, which provide a reflection over various dimensions of open research, the next contributions present various relevant experiences of implementation of open education, narrated step-by-step and highlighting decisions, findings and lessons learned.

Jane-frances Obiageli Agbu, Fred Mulder, Fred de Vries, Vincent Tenebe and Abel Caine, from National Open University of Nigeria, Open Universiteit in The Netherlands and UNESCO (*The Best of Two Open Worlds at the National Open University of Nigeria*) present the NOUN case in relation to OER. The paper explains in detail all the steps followed in the institution until they have reached and OER strategy and agenda. Framed within the situation of other open universities worldwide, NOUN has moved towards an OER-based university, and the paper highlights the process and lessons learned. It is remarkable that the Organizational Leadership Award, granted by the Open Education Consortium Board of Trustees, was awarded in 2016 to NOUN due to its strong determination to become a full-fledged OER-based Open University.

Faye A. Chadwell and Dianna M. Fisher, from Oregon State University (US) (*Creating Open Textbooks: A Unique Partnership Between Oregon State University Libraries and Press and Open Oregon State*) introduce an open textbook initiative launched in partnership between the State and the University Library in Oregon. The project is clearly framed and explained in the paper. Being a successful initiative, it is being continued in a second phase now, with more prospective projects for adopting or developing OER in the horizon.

Also referring to open textbooks as OER, Lawrence Hanley and Diego Bonilla, from the California Open Educational Resources Council (US), (*Atolls, Islands, and Archipelagos: The California OER Council and the New Landscape for Open Education in California*) explain the labour developed by this council. It is conformed by representatives from three California public higher education systems, with the mandate of locating, reviewing and curating a collection of open textbooks for the 50 most highly-enrolled courses. The paper explains the project, with a special focus on scale and complexity that the project has to face; on first findings about open textbook adoption and use, analysed through surveys and focus groups; and on sustainability of the council work. These elements are identified as key dimensions of interest to other OER projects.

Closing this section, another institutional experience by Patrina Law and Anne Jelfs, from The Open University (UK) (*Ten years of open practice: a reflection on the impact of OpenLearn*), reports on the OU platform for free learning in its 10th anniversary. After a descriptive overview of OpenLearn, the authors introduce learners' profiles, and focus specially on OU formal students as users of OpenLearn. The authors, building upon the gathered experience and analysis, collect some lessons learned, useful for open course providers. One of the OpenLearn projects, the Badged Open Courses, was recipient of one of the Open Education Consortium 2016 Project awards, in the category “Creative Innovation”.

The first paper covering the use of OER with specific populations is written by Lauryn Oates and Jamshid Hashimi, from the Darakht-e Danesh Online Library for Educators in Afghanistan (*Localizing OER in Afghanistan: Developing a Multilingual Digital Library for Afghan Teachers*). They describe the development of a digital library in the three languages taught in the Afghan public school system. The need for localizing and contextualizing resources meets the need for increasing the available resources for teaching. Thus, the digital library purports to, at the end, improve teaching methods and educational quality in Afghan schools. The paper explains the process of creating the digital library, encountered challenges and decisions made in this pioneer initiative in Afghanistan.

Leigh-Anne Perryman and Beatriz de Los Arcos, from The Open University (UK) (*Women's empowerment through openness: OER, OEP and the Sustainable Development Goals*), analyse women's digital exclusion and study, based on data collected on the OER Research Hub, developing world's women's interest in using OER, barriers to OER adoption, engagement with OER, and perceived impact of OER on teaching practices. This gender-based study describes women's perceptions and uses about OER and advances their potential for empowerment. The authors suggest some valuable recommendations for OER and OER projects to include a gender equality component.

Finally, a book review completes this special issue about OER and Open Education. Justin Keel, from US, presents a review of *MOOCs: Opportunities, impacts, and challenges. Massive open online courses in colleges and universities*, published by Michael Nanfito.

It is our wish to contribute to the current and exciting debate about open education with the papers included in this issue.

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