

EMBEDDING OPEN EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITIES: ISSUES TO RESOLVE

Universities have a long tradition of freely sharing information and knowledge, through books, journals, the classroom and conferences. However, over the last century, access to this information has become increasingly commercialised and profit-driven. With the advent of internet technologies, access to information and knowledge is, once again, more readily available, and various 'open' initiatives have emerged to challenge the commercialised approach.

The 'open' agenda is a broad, societal one: "Openness is a fundamental value underlying significant changes in society and is a prerequisite to changes institutions of higher education need to make in order to remain relevant to the society in which they exist"[1].

We use the term Open Education to refer to any approach to education that provides a level of openness – in learning materials, interaction with teachers and other learners, with assessment and/or qualifications. We distinguish between various elements:

- Open Content is an overarching term for several content types: Open Educational Resources (OER); Open Textbooks; and Open Courseware
- Open Courses, which combine Open Content with teacher presence
 - o Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

We will discuss various elements of open content, exploring their emerging use at Murdoch University. We explore the granularity of open content – the size and complexity of an element of Open Content, and how this granularity impacts on the usefulness of open content to academic staff, and the barriers to uptake.

Apart from some human factors, the major barriers to the use and production of open content are:

- Intellectual property legislation and regulations, which assert Murdoch University's ownership of IP embodied in teaching materials. Universities must move to a Creative Commons approach, which protects the rights of both the university and the individual creator, while still allowing use and repurposing by others.
- Murdoch University's current Transnational Education (TNE) business model is one in which the University licenses access to the content of a unit to another entity. For open education to progress, universities must move to a situation where Murdoch University

licenses certification for passing the unit rather than one which licenses access to content.

An Open Course complements open content by adding learning tasks and teacher support, either implicitly or explicitly. This may include online self-tests, contact with other learners, lecturers and tutors, and automated or personal feedback on assessments. In other words, it provides or simulates all interactions that would be offered in a traditional model.

Open courses can be richer than traditional, closed courses in that enrolled students can benefit from the experiences and worldviews of other learners. In some cases, a learning community can be established around an open course which transcends the temporal constraints of a unit. Previous students provide a different perspective to currently enrolled students, and industry practitioners can also become part of the learning community.

Some drawbacks of open courses are that non-enrolled learners benefit from an environment that others have to pay for and teachers have to manage discussion posts and assessment submissions by non-enrolled learners. These last factors add to staff workloads without a concomitant contribution to university resources.

The presentation will move on to discuss the evolving, and much-hyped, Massively Open Online Course (MOOC) concept. MOOCs are arguably not open, because, while access is open, the content within the MOOC may be copyright protected.

The hype around MOOCs leads to claims like “Why learn from the best in your country, when you can learn from the best in the world for a fraction of the cost?” Such claims are based around a belief that accessing lecture recordings from world experts will automatically lead to learning, and that teachers at other universities will no longer be needed. The presentation will challenge this claim by unpacking the nature of learning and the teacher’s role in this.

Some people argue that MOOCs are simply an updated, online version of the old-fashioned correspondence course. In addition to textual material, they make use of short video lectures; like distance education courses, they ask consolidation questions, but answers are provided. Unlike distance education courses, they enable learners to interact with peers, but with little structure to that interaction. MOOCs perpetuate

traditional teaching approaches to a larger audience. The approach is teacher-centred, and the scale of MOOCs dictates that teacher interaction with students is minimal. While a MOOC may provide a better learning experience than print-based distance education, the lack of interaction with real teachers makes it a less enriching experience than a traditional lecture-based course.

Consideration needs to be given to the characteristics of students who have the self-efficacy skills to successfully engage with MOOCs. These are likely to be postgraduate coursework students.

At its core, Open Education emphasises the 'public good' over the 'private good'. It provides access to education to those who find it difficult to access in traditional ways. This might include people in developing countries, the disadvantaged in Australia, and University of the 3rd Age learners. Given that physical universities are unable to meet the growing need for higher education in the developing world, Open Education may address that need for those learners with motivation and perseverance.

Universities stand to build their reputation as innovators and providers of high quality education by contributing to Open Education. However, they will need to consider reputational risk and reliance risk. If openly available content is of low quality, then this will damage the reputation of the university. To guard against this risk, universities need to establish expensive production facilities and quality assurance processes. Mitigating reliance risk will require universities to commit human resources to ensure that open content remains accurate over time.

This presentation will conclude by arguing that a considered approach to open education can provide benefits to students, staff and the institution, but that a wholesale adoption of the MOOC approach may be costly, with insufficient return on investment.

[1] <http://opendistanceteachingandlearning.wordpress.com/2012/07/09/openness-as-counter-narrative-omde/>

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