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Reconnecting relationships through technology

Beyond Pressbooks: Towards Decentralised Open Textbook Platforms

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Open Educational Resources (OER) are defined by UNESCO as "any educational resource that may be freely accessed, copied, re-used, adapted and shared and which are available under an open license or are in the public domain for use without paying royalties/license fees."(*Study On International Collaboration on Open Educational Resources (OER)*, 2017). In particular, Open Textbooks (a form of OER that provides an alternative to traditional publisher textbooks) has been found to both reduce costs for students (Wiley et al., 2012) and have been found to be as effective or more effective than traditional textbooks (Robinson et al., 2014). In Australia, Open Textbooks continue to grow in use, being developed through grant projects through the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) and other groups, however as Stagg and Partridge (2019) note, awareness and understanding of OER and open textbooks is still quite low amongst academic staff in some institutions.Additionally, Lambert and Fadel recommend that more resources be earmarked for creation and use of Open Textbooks(Lambert & Fadel, 2022) In this presentation, an alternative to the widely used PressBooks platform is presented as a work in progress, one that that decentralizes the requirement for a single space to author and store Open Textbooks.

PressBooks is an open-source platform for the creation of open textbooks based on the WordPress blogging system. For most organisations, it is primarily implemented as a hosted system, meaning institutions pay for PressBooks to store and maintain their books. Some universities in Australia are exploring PressBooks through pilots that tend to limit instructor access and creation of materials. Inspired by BCCampus' Open Textbook Repository (https://open.bccampus.ca/) and a lack of accessible options for open learning materials creation, the presenter began to explore alternatives.

theopenbook was developed as a Wordpress theme that could be added to any existing Wordpress site, either hosted on WordPress's free site (www.wordpress.org) or on any university or privately-hosted Wordpress site. It provides a fast and modern user experience and navigation, while also providing easy block-based authorship, license selection on each book, design and accessibility choices, LMS / VLE embedding, upvoting and commenting, with ePub and PDF export currently in development. Like PressBooks, *theopenbook* allows for more plugins to be added for collaborative annotation, text-to-speech, automatic podcast generation, dead-link checking, H5P integration and even student-editable content, which can build connection between students while also demonstrating learning (Snowball & McKenna, 2016). Providing multiple means of access, in a mobile-friendly and flexible manner provides students with new ways to interact with learning technologies, learning materials, and each other. For authors, it provides fast and way to start creating with minimal professional learning requirements.

theopenbook is currently being piloted at https://edtech.une.edu.au/books/, housing all learning materials for the University of New England's Graduate Certificate in Digital Learning.

Keywords: OER, Open Textbook, Blog, Open Educational Resources

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