

Open Educational Practices: A focus on instructional design

Danielle Dubien

College of Education, Health &
Human Development
University of Canterbury

Niki Davis

College of Education, Health &
Human Development e-Learning
Lab, University of Canterbury

Annelies Kamp

College of Education, Health &
Human Development
University of Canterbury

Demand for higher education is increasing globally, and to help meet the demand, there are plenty of Open Educational Resources (OERs) available. OERs are openly licensed educational materials. Unfortunately, OERs are slow to be adopted. What is needed are Open Educational Practices (OEPs) which are policies, tools, and actions, among other things that create an environment suited to using OERs. This research aims to find ways to support OEP implementation, particularly the OEPs related to the design and development of effective courses. The research methods include action research on course design and ethnography to describe the organizational context. This poster presents emerging findings from the pilot study carried out at the Open Education Resource universitas (OERu).

Instructional design, Learning Design, Open Educational Practices, OER, OERu

Context: What are OEPs and why are they needed?

Demand for higher education is increasing globally, and higher education qualifications are necessary in highly knowledge-based societies, seeing that “by 2020, 40% of the global workforce will be knowledge workers” (Kanwar & Daniel, 2010, p. 404). Globally, the number of higher education enrollments is expected to increase by approximately 100 million from the current 165 million by 2025 (UNESCO & COL, 2015).

One option to help fill this demand is to use open educational resources (OERs). OERs are instructional materials such as books and courses in print and digital forms that are openly licensed and thus available for reuse, adaptation, and redistribution (Butcher, 2011). There are plenty of OERs available, and UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning have published several books for guiding the adoption of OERs (e.g. UNESCO & COL, 2015). What appears to be missing to make use of the great amount of OERs is the implementation of open educational practices (OEPs), which are tools, policies, instructional and technological training, quality assurance frameworks and other actions, resources, and infrastructure which facilitate the use of OERs (Conole, 2012). One of the organizations promoting OEPs and the use of OERs in higher education is the OERu. The OERu is “An international network of recognised partner institutions from five continents – providing top-quality tertiary courses to students everywhere” (OERu, n.d., para. 1).

The problem addressed by this study, and research questions

The problem is that open educational practices (OEP) are not common in higher education, and where they do occur, there are issues of quality in their implementation (Conole, 2012; Murphy, 2013). In particular, there is concern about the quality of the OERs used for creating accredited courses. The purpose of this research is to determine how to improve instructional design processes for designing and developing high-quality courses using OER within the context of organizational change in higher education with regards to the implementation of OEP.

Main research question and guiding sub-questions

How can the design and development of courses using OERs be improved for use in higher education institutions that implement OEPs?

- How are higher education institutions and networks using instructional design processes for open education?
- What are the current and desired cultures at the institutions involved in this research?
- Which resources and processes may facilitate the implementation of OEPs, particularly for instructional design for open education?

Instructional design

Instructional Design underpins this research. According to Chen (2008) instructional design (ID), also known as learning design, is:

the systematic process of planning events to facilitate learning. The ID process encompasses a set of interdependent phases including analysis of learners, contexts and goals; design of objectives; selection of strategies and assessment tools; production of instructional materials; and evaluation of learner performance and overall instructional design effort (Chen, 2008, p. 1).

Instructional design techniques stem from instructional design theory, which guides practice; it offers direction on how to design instruction. In other words, it describes specific instructional methods, such as providing feedback, and the kinds of situations where the methods are relevant and irrelevant (Reigeluth, 1999).

Plan for the study and researcher roles: The pilot study

This research involves a pilot study and the main study. In each phase, I intend to examine institutional approaches to implementing OEPs and methods of course design. The pilot starts an ethnographic study to examine the organizational culture and processes involved in the implementation of OEPs. The pilot includes interviews with people in different roles such as administrators and faculty regarding their role in implementing OEPs. Other data will be gathered from document review and observation of the OERu and its open design processes. The pilot study serves to examine the OERu and its current course design, development, and delivery processes to identify areas that can be improved. In particular, I aim to determine how instructional design theories are used by the OERu and how they fit into the course design process.

The OERu was chosen for its potential to provide a rich case study of OEPs; additional selection criteria for including other institutions in this research will be developed after the pilot study. The findings from the pilot will also inform my research plan on course design in the main study. While my role in the pilot study will be that of a researcher only, the participant action research of OEP planned in the main study will involve me as an instructional designer as well as a researcher. This poster presents emerging findings from the pilot study, which can be conceptualized as a sketch of the OERu's open educational practices. Emerging findings from the documentary evidence include processes for planning and developing courses. The open culture appears to be developed through web publication of plans and discussions, invitations to volunteers to innovate, and invitations to the public to observe meetings in progress.

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