

EDITORIAL

The Open Education Movement: How Can We Realize its Full Potential?

Anne Gaskell

Great claims have been made about the potential of the Open Education movement to extend accessible and relevant educational opportunities to all. But how far does the reality of Open Educational Practice match these claims? Who is served by the current models of openness? And – more importantly – who is not gaining from new developments and how can any issues be addressed?

All the contributions to this issue of *JL4D* provide new insights into these critical questions and highlight areas to be addressed to ensure that we can meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG) “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning” (see <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Goal-4.pdf>) Our first invited article from Conole and Brown analyses the impact of Open Educational Practices (OEP) on learning, teaching and research. A key point is that Open Educational Resources (OER), despite much hype, are not inherently good in themselves: it depends on how these are used and for what purposes. For example, the availability of OER, eTextbooks and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) does not necessarily mean that these are being used extensively, or that these are reaching target audiences; there is evidence that MOOCs are mainly being studied by those who are already well educated. The impact of open practices on teaching is examined through three frameworks, which include the 7Cs of Learning Design (Conceptualise, Create, Communicate, Collaborate, Consider, Combine, Consolidate), which aim to harness the potential of digital technologies. Conole and Brown conclude in an important section by examining barriers and enablers to the potential of open education to open up education for all. Barriers include institutional inertia, a lack of accreditation, and a paucity of critical conceptions of digital literacy. Enablers could include incentives and rewards to celebrate open practice, professional development opportunities that challenge existing pedagogical practices and the engagement of senior management to put in place appropriate policies and strategies.

Digital technologies and OER have enabled new open practices; but how far are these promoting social justice for all? Our second invited article focuses on this subject. Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter examine to what extent OER and OEP promote social justice and counter inequalities through the discussion of three dimensions: economic, cultural and political. Drawing on examples from the cross-regional Research on Open Educational Resources for Development (ROER4D) Project (2014-2017) (see <http://roer4d.org/>) the authors use a social justice framework to provide examples of interventions that may be neutral, ameliorative or transformative. In many cases the use of OER can



be problematical: they may unintentionally reinforce inequality for those without strong technical infrastructures; they are not culturally neutral and so can reinforce the knowledge domain of the creator. Transformative challenges include to “re-accurturate” (the authors’ term) educational materials and pedagogy and shift the locus of power: the authors conclude that while there is much potential for OER and OEP, the economic, cultural and political dimensions of social justice need to be addressed before open education can reach its potential in providing affordable access to culturally relevant education for all.

Our first research paper is also concerned with the extent to which the Open Education movement is aligned to social justice principles. Lambert argues that there is a lack of definitional clarity for the term “open education” and examines the extent to which recent open education literature is aligned with social justice principles of redistributive, recognitive and representational justice. Through an analysis of nineteen key texts from 2002 – 2017 she argues that the early focus on social justice has been overlaid by other themes. For example, the dominant discourse from the early texts (2002-12) is that access, openness and OER are inherently good and have the potential to improve education (*cf* Conole and Brown). Later texts (2009-2017) extend discussion to widening participation and OEP as innovation for all, while commercial interests also intervene. Lambert concludes by proposing a new definition of open education that is centred on social justice principles.

Both the papers from Conole and Brown, and Lambert note that the open education movement has a long history which includes the development of open universities. Our second research paper by Kaushik and Dhanarajan focuses explicitly on these universities and how far their governance and management support their open ideologies and developmental role. The authors provide the first analysis in this context of six of the approximately 42 open universities in Asian countries, which serve about 11 million students. Their sample includes both public and private universities of different sizes and from different countries (India, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea and Malaysia). Unsurprisingly there are varieties across Asia in a number of key areas: for example, arrangements in place to resolve conflicts between academic and stakeholder interests, degrees of financial autonomy and alignment with open ideologies. Interestingly the Acts and Charters of these universities are largely based on those of campus-based institutions and have not evolved to include the potential of new technologies. The authors conclude that the potential for achieving good governance is there, but progress is still needed to ensure Open Universities fulfil their developmental role and mission.

Open Universities in Asia were established to meet increasing demand for Higher Education due to population growth but also to meet the need for a highly trained population to lead economic development. Tanzania faces similar demands, as is recognized in the Tanzania Vision 2025 (see <http://www.mof.go.tz/mofdocs/overarch/Vision2025.pdf>). However, as Mtebe and Raphael discuss in our third research paper, there is a mismatch between the skills of current graduates and the “21st century” skills needed to support economic development. Students need teachers who are well able to use these skills and integrate them into their teaching and so support their development but teachers need their own development and support. Mtebe and Raphael use the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework (TPACK) to analyse the self-reported confidence of teachers in integrating technology within their teaching to support students in developing 21st century skills. Overall the teachers were reasonably confident in their content and pedagogical knowledge but

less so in their understanding of embedding technology in their teaching. The authors conclude that more professional development is needed.

Unlike the Asian universities studied by Kaushik and Dhanarajan, which had not realized the potential of new technologies in their governance structures, the University of the South Pacific (USP) has been actively involved in developing policies to “future-proof” the university in the context of potential technological advances. Our case study by Naidu and Roberts traces the early development and challenges faced by USP, including those of ownership and governance by 12 island nations, and examines in detail the development of two major new policies: the *Flexible Learning Policy* and the *Open Educational Resources Policy*. Naidu and Roberts describe the essential requirements for such policies to future-proof higher education and this will be of great interest to other countries seeking similar future-proofing. It is also a great pleasure to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of USP in 2018.

Our final article is a report from the field by Gow, Chaudhury, Ganpat and Ramjattan and also concerns the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for Development (ICT4D). These have not always produced effective initiatives or helped the intended recipients in sustainable ways. The authors discuss a Joint Education and Training Initiative (JETI) which is developing and testing a set of OER on “technology stewardship”, a leadership role that supports communities to choose when and how to use technology for their own goals and purposes, and build a community of practice. Agricultural practitioners in Sri Lanka and the Caribbean have been introduced to the concept of technology stewardship and Gow et al discuss initial findings from a pilot study in Trinidad and Tobago, which includes course design, identifying ICT requirements for participants’ chosen communities and a campaign planning exercise. Over three-quarters of the students involved in the pilot intended to undertake follow-up activities.

Our book reviews complement the articles above. *Higher education and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in India* are the focus of a book by Prasad which is reviewed by Pulist. Prasad has been one of the key figures in open and distance education in India since 1982 and this volume, subtitled *Reflections of an insider* provides us with a valuable insight into the development of ODL in India, including various aspects of governance (cf Kaushik and Dhanarajan).

Our second book review, by Balasubramanian, explores the important relationship between learning and development as discussed in Wagener’s book *Learning and development: Rethinking international education in a changing world* (2018). Wagener argues the need to rethink current educational models in the context of international development. He proposes a quadrant learning framework related to learning contexts and learning practices which covers formal and informal learning. While the book is an important contribution to the subject, Balasubramanian comments that more could have been made of the role of education in influencing all 17 development goals (SDGs).

All the articles in this issue assess the huge potential of the open education movement towards meeting goals for social justice and universal education for all. Some of these are related to concepts of social justice (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, Lambert). There are many positives: Open Universities have provided essential institutional structures for developments (Kaushik and Dhanarajan); OER are currently providing crucial technology stewardship training (Gow et al); and new policies are being developed (Naidu & Roberts). However, they all provide examples of where the use of digital technologies is failing to meet their potential in opening up education for all.

What is particularly encouraging is that all articles provide important recommendations for the future: the need for continuing professional development of teachers (Conole & Brown; Mtebe & Raphael; Gow et al); the essential need for supportive leadership and governance (Conole & Brown; Kaushik & Dhanarajan; Naidu & Roberts; Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter); and a core engagement with principles of social justice (Lambert; Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter).

The Cape Town Open Education Declaration 2007 (<https://www.capetowndeclaration.org/read-the-declaration>) noted many barriers to “creating a world where each and every person on earth can access and contribute to the sum of all human knowledge”:

Most educators remain unaware of the growing pool of open educational resources. Many governments and educational institutions are either unaware or unconvinced of the benefits of open education. Differences among licensing schemes for open resources create confusion and incompatibility. And, of course, the majority of the world does not yet have access to the computers and networks that are integral to most current open education efforts.

The articles in this issue demonstrate some of the progress made since 2007 and some important directions for the future.

Anne Gaskell
Chief Editor, JL4D

Cite this paper as: Gaskell, A. (2018). Editorial—The Open Education Movement: How Can We Realize its Full Potential? *Journal of Learning for Development*, 5(3), 183-186.