Welcome to the November-December 2015 edition of the ROER4D Newsletter. As we reach the end of a busy 2015, we would like to take some time to reflect on a particularly busy six months, which has culminated in a number of our sub-projects submitting research reports and nearing the end of their data collection, while some projects are well into finalising their reports.

The group of seven OER Impact Studies are preparing to meet for a workshop from 11-13 January in Sri Lanka. The workshop programme is overseen by Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Maria Ng and Vivien Chiam at Wawasan Open University and is hosted by the Open University of Sri Lanka, where SP10.6 Lead Researcher, Shironica Karananayaka is the Dean of the Faculty of Education. We wish the Impact Studies researchers well for a successful and productive workshop.

Researching in the open - a reflection from the Principal Investigator

Our investigations into conceptualising and operationalising open research continue. From the outset of this project, we have been committed to the principle of ‘open research’. Taking a practical approach to this, we have sought to conduct our research in the open, which has meant as much transparency as possible over the process. We have tried to communicate how we intend to research as well as what we are researching in order to build a network of stakeholders who are interested and invested in researching OER in the Global South. Our project reports and/or book chapters will be released under Creative Commons licenses, and the ROER4D Open Data Initiative aims to release open datasets as well, for projects who deem this useful. Over time and as the project proceeds we have built on our conceptual and practical understanding of what open research and openness means, and shared this at various conferences, workshops and through conversations on our blogs and with other stakeholders.

This thinking and work continued in the presentation Researching OER in the open: Developments in the ROER4D project that Thomas King and I prepared for the Open Education Conference in Vancouver in November 2015. This presentation highlights four dimensions of openness, namely, ideological, technical, legal and practical openness which are described in more detail in a draft paper which we opened up for commenting by anyone. The paper reflects on ROER4D’s initial intentions and commitment to open research and traces the emergence of a more comprehensive and complex set of ‘open research’ practices that evolved during the first two years of the three-year research study, with the intention that this stimulates debate about the nature of open research practices and be of value to other research projects undertaking an open research approach.
OER part of solution to creating capacity for sustainable open, distance and flexible education... read more.

ROER4D Twitter feed

PI Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams presenting at the Open Education Conference, Vancouver, November 2015

Openness remains a contested term with many layers, interpretations and contestations. In order to make it meaningful and contribute to the debate, we continue to engage with others who are exploring this space. We conclude that conducting open research takes time and tenacity! Even if a research team is committed to ideological, technical, legal and practical openness in its activities, the cost of sustained implementation might be too high for open research to be fully realised. Working in a multicultural and multi-linguistic project context has illustrated some of the affordances, difficulties and unexpected consequences of conducting open research, and has led to our more modest aspirations towards open research as well as the necessity to be more deliberate or critical about what and when research should be open. It has prompted us to ask a more fundamental question: 'When and under what circumstances should research be closed?'

News from the Network Hub

The network hub team continues to support the core activities of the ROER4D project under the guidance of PI Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams, Deputy PI Patricia Arinto and Project Manager Tess Cartmill. A key activity has been the establishment of the ROER4D Open Data Initiative which supports the ROER4D researcher community in data management practice and data publication activity. With the support and guidance of Michelle Willmers and Thomas King, researchers in the various sub-projects are encouraged to share traditional text-based outputs such as research reports and papers, as well research data, tools, instruments, multimedia and working documents.

Communications Advisor Sukaina Walji and Evaluation Advisor Sarah Goodier are continuing to liaise with the Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Society Research project (DECI-2) project on implementing the projects’ approaches to and developing capacity in both the Communications and Evaluation functions of the project.

Networking is a core ROER4D objective and the project continues to connect with and nurture relationships with other research projects and stakeholder organisations working to research and improve educational outcomes through open education. New relationships have been forged with the Open and Collaborative Science in Development Network (OCSDNet) and the OER World Map, while deeper relationships with the Commonwealth of Learning, the OER Research Hub, the GO-GN Network and individual researchers in the open education community continue to develop, as we seek to engage with and collaborate on future “open” research projects.

The ROER4D Research Bibliography
This valuable and well-received open bibliography of OER research continues to grow as we add and structure resources. Organised in a Google Spreadsheet, new sections for Open Textbooks, MOOCs, Activity Theory as well as a list of Open Access journals have been added to the core list of OER resources. Earlier this year we were delighted to receive a list of bibliographic references from John Hilton III, and we have now added these references to a specific tab. We welcome feedback and comments and encourage anyone to make a copy of the bibliography for their own purposes.

Round-up from the ROER4D research projects
This newsletter features news from four sub-projects.

SP4 data rendering in process
The Sub-project 4 team has been busy writing the final draft of the research report, seeking publication for an article on its research and preparing presentations to give at upcoming conferences. However, the team has been doing this while Lead Researcher Glenda Cox finalises her PhD thesis on OER at the University of Cape Town. For the past few months, she has been in the process of writing, editing, proofing and submitting the thesis, so it has been a hectic few months for her. Of course, as with all of the other sub-projects, the work carried on nonetheless, with Glenda and Henry Trotter now busy improving the research report based on the useful feedback received from the network hub and their own continued analytical work.

Glenda and Henry have also recently submitted an article for consideration to The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning (IRRODL) titled, 'Institutional culture and OER policy: how structure, culture and agency mediate OER policy potential in South African universities.' This was based on their SP4 research.

Lastly, the team has submitted Abstracts for the OE Global Conference in Poland in April 2016. If accepted, Glenda will be attending, giving a presentation on her PhD work, and the team has also submitted a poster for consideration concerning a conceptual framework they developed during the SP4 research called the 'OER Adoption Pyramid'. This framework helps delineate the factors impacting OER adoption in institutional contexts.

SP5 collaboratively creating and curating mathematics OER for teacher professional development
The Karnataka Open Educational Resources project - Sub-project 5 - is studying whether and how professional learning communities of teachers can collaborate on OER adoption. During August 2015, the research team ran a workshop with high school Mathematics teachers. For the past two years, SP5 has been working with this group of teachers engaging in 'participatory resource creation action research' during which time these teachers have learnt to use the "Geogebra" tool to create resources for teaching mathematics. In this workshop, the aim was to create 'meta-resources' for learning in which the teachers explored and discussed different pedagogical methods in which Geogebra could be used for teaching mathematics. The workshop discussions resulted in the creation of a mind-map functioning as a 'meta' resource to guide teachers on the different pedagogical ways in which the Geogebra tool can be used such as visualization, conceptualization, verification, problem solving and investigation, assessment, demonstration and integration with other disciplines. Using Geogebra, teachers prepared resource keeping in mind these different methods of learning and shared their experiences with others.
Teachers discussed different methods of using Geogebra as a learning resource

Teachers received peer feedback on their creations and learnt how the same resource could be used with more than one pedagogical method. This peer review was a ‘revision’ process, in which new ideas about using the same resource were identified and added as ‘meta-data’ for the resource. Consequently, teachers experienced first hand the power of the OER process of ‘revision’. The OER processes of creating, reviewing and revising these Geogebra resources was intense for the participants and allowed them to reflect on their own ideas of Mathematics teaching. Consequently, teachers discussed how the Geogebra resources could be used to launch a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Geogebra for their colleagues in the state - such a MOOC would potentially enable greater adoption of the OER created in the program.

SP10.3 research presented at the HELTASA conference

Assistant SP10.3 researcher, Michael Glover, recently attended and presented at the HELTASA (Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa) in Potchefstroom, South Africa from 17 – 20 November. His presentation discussed MOOCs and educators’ changing practices with regards to openness. He presented thematic findings from analysing semi-structured interview data, which was collected immediately prior to and immediately after one of the MOOCs under study had completed its first iteration. Michael also presented a poster on Activity Theory approaches to studying change in educators’ practices, which has informed SP10.3’s research approach.

The conference was stimulating, and Michael was able to generate interest in SP10.3’s research and share links about the project and the SP10.3 annotated bibliography. The SP10.3 team is currently working on articulating indicators of openness in the findings by examining the findings in relation to Beetham et al’s conceptions of open practices and Hodgkinson-Williams’ framework of openness.

SP10.6 - Integrating OER in Teacher Education is progressing in Sri Lanka
The SP10.6 research team led by Shironica Karunanayaka and Som Naidu has been continuing with Stages 2 and 3 of the OER-Integration Intervention program at the nine regional centres of the Open University of Sri Lanka (Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Badulla, Kurunegala and Ratnapura). A series of mid-intervention workshops were conducted during July in all nine centres, and data on initial and incremental changes in teachers’ perceptions and practices were collected using a variety of strategies including surveys, concept mapping, lesson plan observations, focus group discussions and self-reflections.

Shironica and Som are developing the OEP-Impact Evaluation Index to capture the perceptions, perspectives and practices of educators as they engage with the adoption and integration of OER in their teaching and learning activities and how these change over time. During Phase 1 - Expert review, the instrument was improved based on feedback from expert practitioners, and at Phase 2 - Item analysis, the improved version was piloted with a group of educators, and the validation process continues.

Shironica and Som presenting at the ICDE Conference, October 2016

The research team, along with colleagues, has also been disseminating the initial findings of the project by presenting research papers at several local and international conferences. These include a presentation on ‘Impacts of OER: What difference does it make and how’ at the 26th ICDE World Conference held 14-16 October, 2015, in Sun City, South Africa; a presentation on ‘Perspectives and Practices of student teachers of OUSL in the use of OER in teaching and learning’ at the The Open University Annual Academic Sessions-2015 held 19-20 November 2015 at OUSL, Sri Lanka; and a presentation ‘Openness in Education: Teacher perspectives through Concept Mapping’ at the 29th AAOU Conference-2015 held 30 November- 3 December 2015, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.