



Research on Open Educational Resources for Development

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May-June 2016 Newsletter

Welcome to the May-June edition of the ROER4D newsletter. With less than a year to go until the project is due to report final findings, many of the OER Adoption studies sub-projects are in the final stages of their data analysis and are reporting findings, with one or two working on near final versions of their research reports. Many of the OER Impact studies sub-projects are at the data collection stage and are submitting interim research reports. The Network Hub team continues to support the researchers and is delighted to be assisting more sub-project researchers release their data openly under the ROER4D Open Data Initiative.

A recent highlight for the project was the award of an Open Research Award at the Open Education Global Conference, Poland. ROER4D Network Hub team members Henry Trotter and Sukaina Walji along with Sub-project 4 lead researcher Glenda Cox were on hand to collect the award on behalf of PI Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams and the ROER4D team. The ROER4D's Network Hub team's approach to and critical reflections on Open Research forms the basis of a paper titled '[Dimensions of open research: critical reflections on openness in the ROER4D project](#)', which was published as one of the selected conference papers from the OE Global conference and published in Open Praxis.



The ROER4D Team with the OEC Open Research Award

Another recent highlight was ROER4D's attendance at the the Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Society (DECI-2) workshop held in Cape Town in May. In addition to meeting the DECI-2 team and mentors, the ROER4D team were delighted to meet up with IDRC program officer Matthew Smith who joined the workshop. Colleagues from two other IDRC projects also attended the workshop: Becky Hillyer from the [Open and Collaborative Science Network](#) (OCSDNet) and Alison Gillwald and Chennai Chair from the [Research ICT Africa Network](#). The ROER4D team [presented](#) their approach on Evaluation and Communications and shared ideas and experiences with the other projects and mentors.

Returning to the theme of Open Research, in our feature article Thomas King explores how Open Research is defined, conceptualised and enacted in the ROER4D project, and in particular what is meant by “ideological openness” and how it can benefit researchers and research teams. We also have a round-up of news from four of the Impact Studies, and we preview some forthcoming enhancements to the ROER4D website.

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Feature Article: Ideological Openness - More than just a principle

In the paper [“Dimensions of Open Research: Reflections on ‘critical openness’ in the ROER4D project”](#), the ROER4D Network Hub described its vision of “ideological openness”: “the belief that openness in research can add value to the research process” (King et al., 2016). In this article Thomas King explains the team's conception of Open Research and how an explicit open ideological statement can help researchers conduct their research in a more open and rigorous way.

What is Open Research?

Open Research (for the purposes of this article, synonymous with “Open Science”) is research conducted, to some degree, “in the open”. This can range from releasing final outputs in Open Access journals or repositories, providing access to underlying data, releasing early findings or interim outputs, sharing methodology statements, utilising open, collaborative approaches to peer review, or even collaboratively developing and sharing research proposals and scoping documents.

The degree to which any one researcher or research group knows and engages with these principles is, however, highly variable. Openness isn't a single position; it is instead a spectrum of research orientations, practices and legal mechanisms that facilitate maximum reuse and collaboration around a range of research artefacts. As such, Open Research is not a methodology, but is instead a highly variable orientation, based on a set of ideas and beliefs about openness: an ideological position on openness.

What is ideological openness?

In the book, [Opening Science: The Evolving Guide on How the Internet is Changing Research, Collaboration and Scholarly Publishing](#), Fecher and Frieska detail five schools of Open Science, each of which approaches the idea with a different set of assumptions about what practicing science in the open entails. While key figures in the OER community have attempted to develop a shared vocabulary of open practices, including guidelines detailing how to practice Open Research ([Bare, 2014](#); [Molloy, 2011](#)), it remains a multifaceted, highly variable undertaking. Some researchers focus on publishing in Open Access journals, others on releasing data, and some open up the process of research itself to external comment, or even participation.

This diversity of orientations and practices shares a single core idea: that in some way, the research endeavour can benefit from exposing, sharing and making more transparent the various processes in the knowledge production lifecycle. While Open Research practice holds potential cost saving benefits in terms of avoiding replication, it also has cost implications in terms of the additional time, resources and funding that is required.

The rapidly evolving terrain of Open Research and the high number of disciplinary dynamics suggests that it may be optimal for researchers and projects to develop their own ideological position towards the endeavour. Stating an explicit position on Open Research provides a guide for future practice and a touchstone for evaluating the project's commitment to its ideological and operational principles. This position need not be dogmatic or static, but should be critical, allowing researchers to modify their approach (within the limits of their contractual and ethical constraints) as the notion of Open Research develops and as they themselves progress in their engagement with open practice.

Moreover, the absence of an explicit ideological statement does not imply the absence of an implicit ideological position. Any research project engaging in Open Research must have some concept of what Open Research entails, and this concept may not be uniform across the researchers involved in that project. In the ROER4D project, for example, many of the researchers and Network Hub members were new to Open Research when they began work on the project, held differing understandings of what openness entailed, and had different time and resourcing capacities to fruitfully engage with the concept and implement open practices.

Why ideological openness?

“Open Research” is a relatively recent term; there is therefore an element of

uncertainty and innovation entailed in choosing to engage with this paradigm. In ROER4D, the desire to enact our ideological openness in conjunction with the natural congruence between OER and Open Research informed much of the Network Hub's initial thinking around operationalising its Open Research approach right from the proposal stage. It also informed subsequent revisions to the approach that were made as the realities of coordinating a cross-regional, multilingual research project became clearer.

Is Open Research conceptually novel? Key principles underlying the traditional academic research endeavour include the production, quality assurance and dissemination of knowledge (Bartling & Friesike, 2014). Far from contradicting any of these principles, Open Research instead offers new tools and approaches to accomplish the goals that many researchers aspire to: greater quantity, quality, and access to knowledge. The ROER4D Network Hub experience has been that increased openness has demanded greater rigour in our own practice due to the "many eyes" effect (Howe 2008). The project does not share its outputs and processes publicly for the sake of it; but instead does so because it adds value, is appropriate in context, aids rigour and research capacity development, and increases the potential for our work to be cited and reused. Open Research doesn't merely have to be an altruistic commitment; it can also be a pragmatic research strategy aimed at boosting impact, visibility and collaboration.

The technical, legal and operational imperatives that ideological openness requires are further explored in the [Dimensions of Openness paper](#) and the [presentation at OE Global 2016](#).

I'd like to thank Michelle Willmers from the ROER4D Network Hub for her insightful contributions and editorial expertise, and my colleague at CILT, Shanali Govender, for her thoughts on the nature of the academic enterprise.


The new ROER4D website

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We have made a number of changes and enhancements to the ROER4D website, which will be launched at the end of June. Regular visitors will notice that we have consolidated the menus with the most significant change being that the Adoption studies and the Impact studies projects now appear under one Sub-projects menu enabling easy access and an overview of all the projects from one space. As we move towards dissemination of findings, we have also revised the design of the individual Sub-project pages to allow more space for project information and links to outputs. Information about the Advisory Group and Network Hub now falls under a new “About” menu, which features a new Gallery. The Gallery enables us to share some of the photographs at key events such as the ROER4D workshops and conferences; we hope you will enjoy the memories as our network and activities grow.

Indeed, as our network continues to become more well known we are getting increasing numbers of invitations and offers to connect and we felt it was important to provide an easier way of connecting the ROER4D network with the outside world. We have created an online Directory, which is a listing of the researchers, network hub team, advisory group and mentors bringing together people’s contact details that are already on the website in one place. The aim is to help build the network’s profile and allow others to connect with members in the ROER4D network. Users of the directory can filter results by sub-project or geographical region in which a researcher is based.

Sub-project news and round-ups

SP10.1 Engaging with the ‘world beyond’: the impact of OER on practices in teacher education institutions in East Africa

[Sub-project 10.1](#) led by Freda Wolfenden is looking at the impact of OER

engagement on the pedagogic practices of teacher educators and how shifts in their practice inform wider education practices and policies in teacher education institutions.

The research team gathered data at participating institutions in Uganda and Tanzania during March and April. Via local academic colleagues they distributed individual questionnaires to OER adopters in the University of Dar es Salaam, Open University of Tanzania, Kyambogo University, Jinja College and Makerere University. Responses to the questionnaires then formed the starting points for a series of one-to-one interviews with 11 semi-structured interviews carried out by Pritee Auckloo in Tanzania and 17 by Jane Cullen in Uganda. The interviewees included Assistant Lecturers, Lecturers, Heads of Department, Deans, Directors of Centre and DVCs.

Both survey and interview included questions on themes of collaboration, openness and technology in terms of access to the 'world beyond'. They have only just begun to look at the data in detail but have seen already that there is interesting ambiguity between perspectives on online access, elearning, OER, 'free' learning and open practices. Questions of freedoms, rights, copyright and constraints arose in many of the conversations. Individual perspectives sit within the context of policies which in several institutions include ambitious plans for extending the reach of distance education and proposals for significant changes in academic teaching practices. For some individuals familiar with OER openness can mean 'limitless' possibilities in terms of access and opportunities. Other participants express much more caution in terms of the implications for teaching and learning.

SP10.3 study on MOOC educators present initial research findings

[Sub-project 10.3](#) led by Laura Czerniewicz is researching how and in what ways adopting OER in and for MOOCs has an impact on educators' open practices. Members of the research team have recently presented research at two conferences with Michael Glover [presenting findings](#) from the second of four sets of MOOC educators at the Teaching and Learning conference at the University of Cape Town in March. The presentation was well received and the slides and video of the presentation have been shared more widely. In May Lead Researcher Laura Czerniewicz presented findings from the first MOOC as conference proceedings at the Networked Learning Conference 2016 in Lancaster with the [paper](#) being published as part of the conference proceedings.

The team has also recently prepared and submitted a paper to the Journal of Computing in Higher Education in which initial findings cover four broad themes of changed open practices and attitudes. The team has entered the final quarter of

their research project and look forward to synthesizing their findings in the upcoming research report.

SP 10.5 Investigating the impact of OER on secondary and tertiary education in Pakistan

The [Sub-project 10.5](#) team is undertaking the collection of research project data from secondary schools and universities to determine the use of OER resources by teachers and students in Pakistan. In randomly selected secondary public schools of Punjab, data collection spanned two phases. In the first phase, data was collected from administrators of public schools and after an analysis of questionnaires schools were short-listed for the second phase of data collection from teachers and students. Data has now been collected from teachers and students in secondary schools with data analysis now underway. In universities, data collection took place over January-April 2016 with data having been collected in 15 universities in Pakistan.

Two research papers were presented on open educational resources at secondary schools and university level at the 3rd e-Learning and Distance Education Conference (ELDEC) conference, which was organized by Virtual University of Pakistan 14-15 March 2016.

SP 10.6 Integrating OER in Teacher Education in Sri Lanka: Capturing Changes in Teacher Perceptions and Practices and Impacts

The [Sub-project 10.6](#) research team, led by Shironica Karunanayaka and Som Naidu, has been actively engaged with compiling data collected during the various stages of the OER-Integration Intervention programme conducted at the nine Centres (Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Badulla, Kurunegala and Ratnapura) of the Open University of Sri Lanka.

Draft “Stories” are being written by the participant teachers, reflecting on changes in their perceptions and perspectives about OER, Open Educational Practices (OEP), and impacts on their teaching-learning process, while “Case Studies” on each Centre are being planned by the research team members. This will be the key focus of the final evaluation workshops scheduled to be conducted in mid-June, at different Centres. They have collected data for approximately 300 teachers and approximately 3185 students.

The research team also plans to disseminate their findings at various conferences including OURS -2016 (Open University Research Sessions), [AAOU-2016](#) and [PCF8](#).

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