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Open Scholarship

Essay by Melissa Hagemann, June 4, 2008 in response to The Opening of Science and Scholarship

Who controls access to educational materials in the age of the internet? Today many students are priced out of an education, not because of the cost of tuition, but because of the price of textbooks.

Lessons from the open access movement, which Peter Suber has played a pivotal role in developing, are now being applied to open education. Building upon the Budapest Open Access Initiative, which first defined open access in 2002, educators, internet pioneers, and foundations launched the Cape Town Open Education Declaration in January 2008. The declaration calls for publicly funded educational materials to be made freely available over the internet, the use of open content licenses, and the collaborative production of materials. In addition, over 1,000 professors in the U.S. recently signed a statement supporting the use of free, online open source textbooks.

Open educational resources (OER) are digitized materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and re-use for teaching, learning and research. OER have the potential to improve the quality and reduce the costs of educational materials.

The promise of open education and collaborative production is exemplified by the Connexions project developed by Rice University. The Connexions' content commons contains educational materials produced by the community and organized into small modules that are easily connected into larger courses and textbooks. To provide quality control, the project employs lenses which are being developed by universities, professors, and professional societies to tag content they deem to be high quality. Connexions has partnered with on-demand press Qoop to deliver hard copy textbooks, developed using material from the Connexions content commons, that can be purchased for as little as $15. For-profit open textbook projects, such as Flat World, are also in development. Flat World Knowledge will offer free online textbooks, while selling supplemental materials and hard copies to generate revenue.

Encouraged by the success of open access mandates to research literature such as the recent U.S. National Institutes of Health mandate, OER advocates are forming grassroots open education advocacy groups. In Poland the Association of Polish Librarians, Polish Wikipedia Association, Creative Commons Polska, and Modern Poland Foundation have formed an OER working group which has already received the support of the Deputy Prime Minister. They will organize a meeting on open education policy in the Polish Parliament in August. Globally, the movement advocates for taxpayer-funded educational resources to be OER and for preference to be given to OER in textbook accreditation and adoption processes. Open education policies will stipulate that if an author takes public funding and uses it to produce educational materials, then the materials will be made freely available online. Authors, such as those receiving substantial royalties, would be free to opt out by not accepting public funding.

Similar to open access, open education has the potential to play a leading role in the democratization of the internet. No longer will access be controlled by publishers. As Peter Suber rightly notes in "The Opening of Science and Scholarship", "In the age of print, publishers could control access to research they did not conduct, write up, sponsor, fund, or purchase. One

reason is that publishers controlled the most effective channel of distribution; but that has changed."

While replicating the success of the open access movement will not be easy, OER advocates are working with the open access community and learning from their success. Together open access and the blossoming open education movement have the potential to create a truly global learning and knowledge commons which can lay the foundation for open scholarship.

Melissa Hagemann manages the Open Access Initiative *within the Information Program of the Open Society Institute/ Soros Foundations. Since convening the meeting in December 2001 that led to the development of the* Budapest Open Access Initiative*, OSI has been active within the Open Access movement, which advocates for the free online availability of peer-reviewed literature.*

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