International OER Initiatives

OER Community Conversations

OpenCourseWare Consortium Global Meeting and Conference
Hanoi, Vietnam
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Educational Policy and OpenCourseWare

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Highlights from the OER Community Discussion with the OCW Consortium October 5-15, 2010

Roles of OER

OER is a wide term, encompassing different concepts. Many people appreciated Steve Carson's description of different roles that OER can fill (summarized beautifully by Thomas Pfeffer):

- OER as a substitute,
- OER as a reusable resource,
- OER as transparency, and
- OER as learner generated or modified content, as suggested by Stephen Downes.

Bring OER into the mainstream

There seems to be widespread agreement that for OER to move into a more central place in education, a culture shift among educators needs to occur to one that favors using OER, or "learning to share". Stephen Downes pointed out that there are many examples of sharing

across the web already, so from a learner perspective the culture already exists. We need to encourage sharing through OER with audiences of learners. This can be tricky given that people are coming to learn many different things in many different places, according to their own needs and their abilities to locate OERs. There are some courses using OER that are running openly, examples were given from P2PU and the University of Illinois Virtual Campus.

Encouraging participation and use

There are also barriers to participating in OER, both for individuals and institutions. Many of these can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the potential benefits and perceived risks for creating OER. The community has been creating materials to address these issues; examples were given from the OCW Consortium, UNESCO, P2PU, Wikieducator and blog posts. For using and modifying OER, there are issues for both educators and learners. For educators, there is not yet sufficient incentive, formally (institutionalized) or informally (culturally), for widespread use of OER developed by others. For learners, the array of resources spread out over numerous repositories makes locating appropriate OER and judging its quality quite challenging. For both educators and learners, the existence of OER is still relatively unknown. We still have work to do to promote the existence and potential contributions of OER to formal and informal education.

Sustainability

Much discussion focused on the economic sustainability of OER. Fred Beshears and others talked about the degree of self-interest, or value, attributed to OER production and use as an essential consideration for business models. Given the different roles of OER, these business models will look very different from institution to institution. Overall, however, many encourage us to keep our eyes on the mission of improving educational offerings and access on a global scale.

A comment on the discussion

This discussion marked the first one in the OER Community in its new base at Athabasca University. It also was the first discussion related to a meeting on OER. It was hoped that the broader sharing of information about the meeting would mean that more people would benefit from the reflections on the sessions and discussion taking place in the growing number of conferences, meetings and sessions related to OER.

After all, sharing is at the heart of the OER movement.