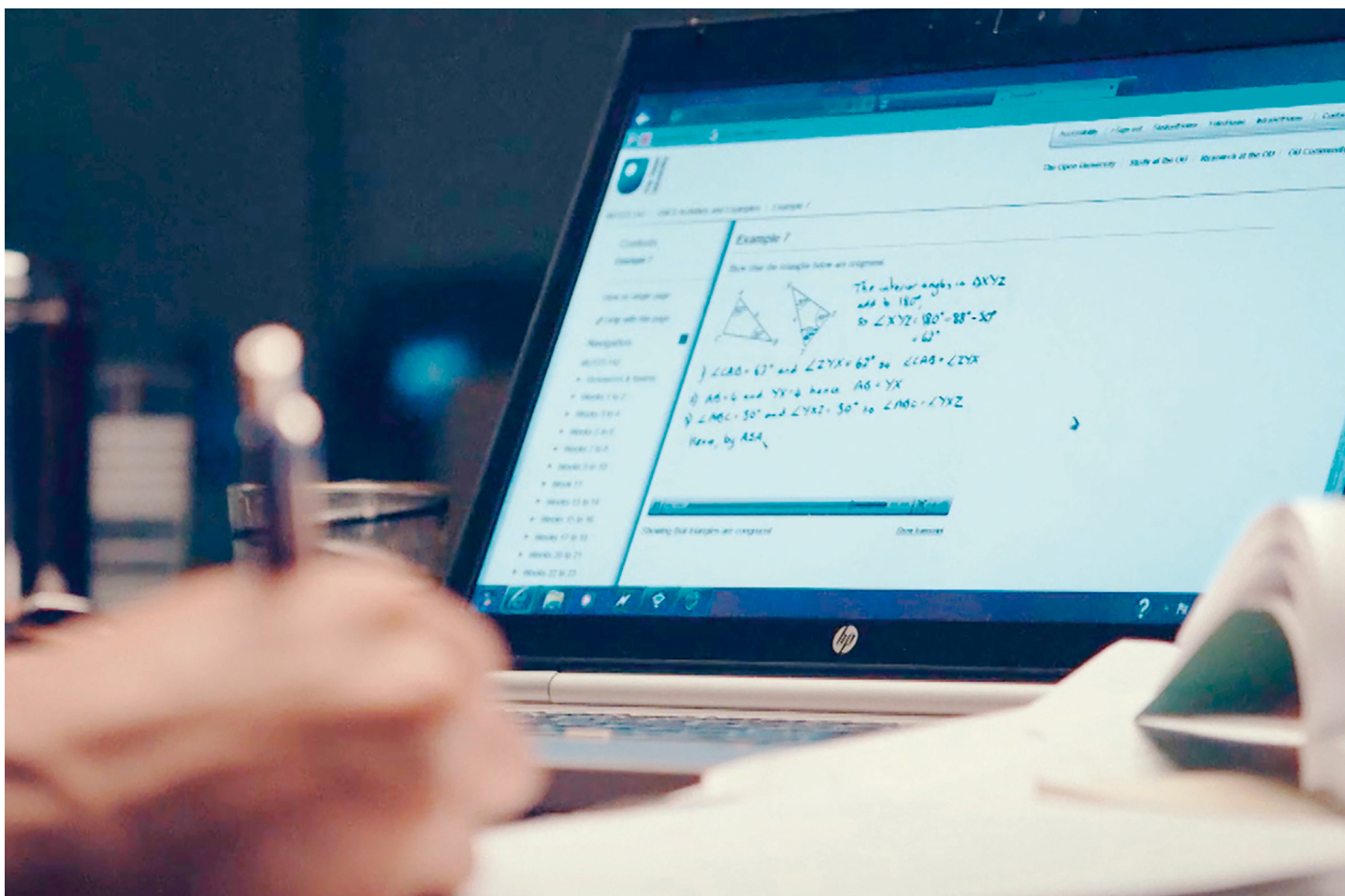# OpenLearn

The Open University

An introduction to Open Educational Resources (OER)

This item contains selected online content. It is for use alongside, not as a replacement for the module website, which is the primary study format and contains activities and resources that cannot be replicated in the printed versions.

About this free course

This free course is an adapted extract from the Open University course H800 *Technology-enhanced learning: practices and debates* : www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/modules/h800 .

This version of the content may include video, images and interactive content that may not be optimised for your device.

You can experience this free course as it was originally designed on OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University –
www.open.edu/openlearn/education/introduction-open-educational-resources-oer/content-section-0

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

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Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

Contents

Introduction

In this free course you will get to know more about open educational resources (OER), which can be used on their own or alongside social learning tools that allow learners to share content and experiences.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of postgraduate level study in Online and Distance Education.

Learning outcomes

After studying this course you should be able to:

*   understand and have a better knowledge of some of the choices that practitioners make about ways of applying technologies for a variety of learners across the globe in education, training or professional development
*   understand and have a better knowledge of the potential and actual advantages of open educational resources, and how these might benefit learners in a wide range of contexts.

1 Open Educational Resources (OER)

The internet provides vast amounts of OER for use and reuse. This may be text, video, graphics or audio and is free of charge. It's usually produced by educational institutions and published online to the general public for their immediate use or for repurposing according to the users' needs. This fast-paced *Short History of English* , for example, was loaded onto YouTube by The Open University in 2011.

Video content is not available in this format.

Short History of English

OER can also be created by individuals, so the production of OER is not exclusive to educational institutions although largely dominated by them.

In this course you will look at three institutional OER initiatives – MIT's open courseware, Carnegie Mellon's Open Learning Initiative and The Open University's OpenLearn. You will get a flavour of how different OER initiatives design and present the content for their audiences.

You will also have the option to find, discuss and redesign some OER material. You can choose your audience for the material and redesign it to fit their needs.

2 An introduction to OER

Activity 1

🕐 *About an hour*

- To get a sense of the global and governmental context of OER, explore this presentation by Sir John Daniel, a former vice-chancellor of The Open University, where he sets out the context of the 2012 Paris Declaration on OER.
- Search on 'Creative Commons' if you're not familiar with the concept, and read/ skim some of your hits.
- Read one of Martin Weller's blog entries from early in 2013 – Openness has won – now what? – where he argues that:

   'it's hard not to conclude that openness has prevailed… Whether it's open access publishing, open data, MOOCs, OERs, open source or open scholarship – the openness battle has largely been won.'

   Later that year, he argued that 'it's a mistake to talk about openness as if it's one thing'.

3 Exploring OER

Many educational institutions worldwide are offering OER. This is a way to widen access to educational material to a variety of audiences with diverse interests. Note, too, that the Commonwealth of Learning declaration stressed its goal that OER should 'enter the educational mainstream'.

In this activity we would like you to visit some OER websites. You will notice that the sites vary in format, in what they offer and in how they expect the user to engage with their materials.

Activity 2

🕐 *About two hours*

- Please visit the following initiatives and reflect upon their differences in purpose, content design and the tools available for the learner. You might wish to make brief notes, or draw up a table, comparing the features of each site that interests you.

    MIT Open Courseware (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA)

    MIT was the first institution to offer OER. It presented the first pilot website in 2002 with 50 courses, and by early 2015 was offering extracts from more than 2000 courses with free lecture notes, tests and videos. It's an interesting site to look around, including under the 'About' tab.

    Open Learning Initiative (OLI, Carnegie Mellon University, USA)

    The 'Learn with OLI' tab is a good place to start, to see the range of courses that is offered. 'Studying Effectively' (at the time of writing, it's at the bottom of the home page) will give you an idea of the learning strategy that OLI proposes, including 'learn by doing'. This captioned video from The Open Learning Initiative begins by arguing that higher education faces a major challenge:

    'We're asking faculty and institutions to teach many, many, many more students. And we're giving them 50 minutes to try and address the needs of that much larger group with a much greater diversity. And then we wonder why pass rates, failure rates are so high. It's an undoable task without better tools and better support.'

Video content is not available in this format.
🎧
Exploring OER

    OpenLearn (The Open University, UK)

    There's plenty of material to choose from here. You might like to pick an area you know about already, and decide what you think about the material you find. Or choose an area you know little or nothing about…

    iTunes U (International) and The Open University on iTunesU

At iTunes U numerous universities make their content available, in the form of lectures, videos, films and other resources. You can download the content in different formats, such as PDF or MP3. The Open University joined iTunes U in 2008 and currently provides content from over 130 of its modules.

4 Redesigning some OER

In Activity 3 we give you the option to redesign some OER material for learners that you choose. You may be working in training or education and have some learners in mind. You may be thinking of your friends or family, and of things you feel they might like to learn.

Activity 3

🕐 *Between two and three hours*

- Find some OER material (for example, from one of the sites in Activity 2) that interests you, or that you think you might like to develop. It could be on a topic you know about, or something completely new.
- Decide who your learners are – what they already know (if anything) about the topic you've chosen, what might get them interested. (You may need to cycle through these first two bullet points a few times, before you settle on some material and some learners.)
- Now that you've found the material, and have decided on your learners, set out what you see as the material's strengths and weaknesses. What's missing? Does it go into too much detail, or not enough? If the material's on a topic that is completely new to you, you can test it against your own requirements: does it help *you* learn?
- Find or suggest some new content – and explain what this adds to the existing material, and why you feel it will be useful and relevant for *your* learners.

5 An interactive quiz question about OER

Activity 4

🕐 *About 5 minutes*

Of these three institutions, which was the first to provide free online open educational resources (OER)?

- The Open University
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology

....

Answer

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Here's the link to [MIT's Open Courseware](#) .

6 Ideas for further reading and exploration

1. Here are three blogs you might enjoy exploring. Their authors raise a number of interesting questions, including those of relevance to openness:

    Doug Clow's Imaginatively-titled Blog

    e4innovation.com

    The Ed Techie , written by Martin Weller.

    You could also try Stephen Downes' blog , and sign up to daily alerts.

2. ' "OER university" to cut cost of degree ', wrote the Times Higher Education in early 2011. You could search to see how it has developed.

3. If you enjoy UK literature, you may be interested to see how the connections between twentieth-century UK novelists have been presented in OpenLearn.

4. OER Readiness in Africa (2010) by Pauline Ngimwa – a report focusing on the technological and human factors that have a bearing on the distribution and use of OER in three African countries.

5. There's more on OER in the developing world in Perryman, L., Buckler, A. and Seal, T. (2014)
    Learning from TESS-India's approach to OER localisation across multiple Indian states . This explores the challenges of repurposing OER to meet the needs of India's teacher educators, and shows how the context in which OER are to be used can affect the ways in which they are repurposed.

6. D'Antoni, S. and Savage, C. (eds) (2010) *Open Educational Resources – Conversations in Cyberspace* , Paris, UNESCO; also available online at http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=28899&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_-SECTION=201.html .

7. Weller, M. (2014) *The Battle for Open: How Openness Won and Why it Doesn't Feel Like Victory* , London, Ubiquity Press; DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/bam .

Conclusion

We hope you've enjoyed studying this short course. If you've worked through the first activity, you'll have a sense of the underlying ethos of OER and the principles set out in the Paris Declaration. That dates from 2012, of course – a long time ago in the fast-moving world of technology-enhanced learning. But the principles continue to inspire and generate exciting work and research. And in
Technology-enhanced learning: practices and debates (H800) , from which this material is extracted, we encourage students to explore the latest developments in digital education and learning.

You may have already been familiar with the OER sites in Activity 2. If so, you may have decided to look further afield. But if you weren't familiar with those resources from MIT, Carnegie Mellon and The Open University, that activity will have given you ideas about what's available.

And finally, with Activity 3, you had the chance to redesign some material for your own learners. And if you skipped it because you don't have any learners? You can always go back and spend a few minutes thinking about how you would adapt some OER material for friends or people in your family.

All in all, we hope this sample material has whetted your appetite to continue exploring OER, and to further your interest in the rich field of technology-enhanced learning. For example, you could study a much larger block of free material, where you can explore several facets of 'openness' – including MOOCs, other aspects of OER, and 'rhizomatic learning'. That block is adapted from the Open University course
H817 _Openness and innovation in elearning_ , which is a companion course to H800 within The Open University's Masters in Online and Distance Education .

Acknowledgements

Don't miss out:

If reading this text has inspired you to learn more, you may be interested in joining the millions of people who discover our free learning resources and qualifications by visiting The Open University - www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses