

Barriers to Open Education (and How to Help Break Them Down)

Welcome to this week's video. Today I'm going to address some of the biggest barriers to open education, how they've been slowly resolved over time, and what we can do to break down these barriers a little faster.

The first major barrier to open education is a lack of awareness. Specifically, this barrier refers to educators' lack of awareness of how open education works and what Open Educational Resources (OER) are. This is a problem for obvious reasons: if educators don't realize that open education is an option for them, they're unable to take advantage of the resources it provides.

The 2017 Babson Survey on open textbooks found that only 45% of their 2,700 respondents were aware of OER at all. But although these statistics are low, they also show growth from previous years' studies, with the percentage of faculty aware of OER climbing steadily over the past three years. So clearly, there has been some growth in this area, and the lack of awareness that individuals have is becoming less pronounced.

So what can you do to help? Depending on your situation, there are a few options for how you can combat the awareness barrier in open education, which I've outlined here.

But a lack of awareness isn't the only problem inhibiting open education today. Another barrier is the lack of ancillary materials available for instructors. These types of materials—test banks, quizzes, and other resources—are often included in publisher packages with textbook purchases. However, historically, fewer of these supplementary materials have been available for Open Educational Resources. This has become a major barrier, but there is hope. This barrier, like the previous one, has been slowly overcome over the past few years. How? Through the development of openly available supplementary materials by educators and through the development of free and low-cost materials by groups like OpenStax and Lumen Learning.

So, you might wonder, how can you help if things are slowly getting better anyway? Well, you can start by creating your own lesson plans or quizzes to pair with an open textbook, or by keeping existing OER up to date.

The final barrier to open education that we face today is the problem of findability issues for OER, and the time required for educators to locate and evaluate resources. Now, there are a lot of great Open Educational Resources available today, but educators still need to find, review (and sometimes edit) these resources to make sure that the information they present will work for them. And that can be a major problem. This barrier has been an issue for years now, and the lack of findability for OER is something that faculty have lamented for a long time.

However, things are improving. Finding Open Educational Resources has become much easier as high-quality OER repositories like OER Commons and the Open Textbook Library have been developed. Furthermore, some tools, like George Mason University's OER Metafinder, provide a method for searching multiple repositories from a single place. And you can help some of these repositories stay relevant and up to date by donating to their cause.

But finding OER isn't the only issue here. Educators also need to spend time locating and evaluating these resources, and often, their work isn't truly valued. But that's starting to turn around, too. Over the past few years, a lot of work has been done to make open education a more attractive option for educators. Higher education institutions have begun implementing policies and creating grants that incentivize faculty using OER in their courses. Multiple U.S. states have helped to create infrastructure to support the adoption and use of OER in their schools, and both Canada and the U.S. have made huge strides toward making open education more accessible, with some schools, like the University of British Columbia, even acknowledging OER creation in their tenure and promotion process.

It's clear that there has been substantial support and growth in the open education movement over the past five years, and that this trend will likely continue. But it doesn't have to be slow. We can help these efforts by actively supporting educators who use Open Educational Resources and practices in their classes, by advocating for funding and infrastructure to support these changes, and by donating to high-quality OER repositories available today, like OpenStax.

From educators to students, librarians to lawmakers, we can all play a part in breaking down barriers to make education more affordable and accessible for individuals around the globe.

Thanks for watching. Feel free to check out my library guide and related resources in the description.