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Using OER to Address Education Inequality in Poorer South African Schools

Student Dissertation

How to cite:

Penny, Grant (2015). Using OER to Address Education Inequality in Poorer South African Schools. Research Summary for the Open University module H818 The Networked Practitioner

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SAT: Using OER to Address Education Inequality in Poorer South African Schools (Grant Penny)

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22 December 2014

Extra content

The term OER was first coined in 2002 by UNESCO, following substantial development through institutions such as MIT's OpenCourseWare (Smith, 2009:90). The growth of MOOC's, OER repositories, and Creative Commons have spurred the OER movement, where in 2014 the quantity of Creative Commons licences work will near 900 million (Creative Commons, 2014). The benefits are plentiful, from OER's being fundamentally free, to the limitless sharing, remixing, and adapting, that Creative Commons licensors allow. Despite this, the development of new materials, and access to OERs has been considerably greater in the global north (Lane, 2010:02), having a minimum impact on the regions that could arguably benefit the most.

With approximately 45% of students failing to reach the grade 12 examination (BusinessTech, 2015), a host of "barriers" to education (Brook, 1996: 206), and severe wealth inequality, South Africa has the potential to reap maximum reward from embracing an OER led education initiative. The pace to provide OER in South Africa has increased with a host of local ventures. Most notably, the anticipated launch of the University of the Witwatersrand MOOC – the first South African created MOOC in partnership with EdX (University of the Witwatersrand, 2014). As well as the continual growth of the TESSA initiative and a host of smaller ventures, such as Siyavula and OpenUCT.

For these initiatives to reach their potential, there are obstacles to inclusion that need to be tackled. A mobile-focused OER learning environment is highly important as 71% of South Africans use their mobiles to access the internet (Lanerolle, 2012:11). Alongside this, is localization of content and translation, to meet the demands of South Africa's 11 official languages.

With the aim of collating the current and future selection of OER's that are created in, or can be applied to South Africa, the author is developing a website. The website is inherently inclusive focused, and seeks to spur growth in the OER movement in South Africa. The website will have the following features:

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In Cloudscapes

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- ▶ A mobile-friendly interface requiring a minimal amount of data.
- ▶ A tally of how many resources are available for a given subject area, and which subjects need further development.
- ▶ A uniquely South African lexis, with relevant academic grades, and subject areas.
- ▶ Material and language availability in South Africa's main languages.
- ▶ Accessibility features, such as colour-scheme, and font size adjustments.

In the presentation, an expansion on the rationale behind a website as an artefact to achieve the above will be given. Further topics to be covered include:

- ▶ The ability for OER to be an inclusive tool.
- ▶ How the current education system is excluding South African's.
- ▶ How OER can be a solution to the given inclusion problems, and the additional benefits it could bring.
- ▶ A methodology for how the artefact will be initiated.
- ▶ The future of the artefact beyond the conference.



[Grant Penny](#)

09:24 on 11 January 2015 (Edited 07:42 on 16 January 2015)

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[Sheila Greenwood](#)

2:38pm 13 January 2015 [Permalink](#)

Hi Grant, I think your topic and artefact sounds most interesting. I have visited South Africa and my husband was born there; I do understand the value that such open educational resources could bring. Is the artefact as a website something that is just an idea, partly or fully developed? I hope to view your slot at conference.

Sheila

2015

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[Grant Penny](#)

11:56pm 13 January 2015 [Permalink](#)

Hello Sheila, thank you for the comment.

The aim is for the website to be at least partly developed by the time of the conference, with the aim of it becoming a real resource for students in the near future. The session itself will focus mostly on the need for OER in SA, and then move on to discussing the website as a medium to deliver content. I am aiming for it to be viewable by those attending at that stage. In the weeks following the conference (and beyond), more and more content will be added.

Kind regards,

Grant.



[matthew street](#)

6:09pm 28 January 2015 [Permalink](#)

Hi Grant,

I think this is a great idea looks to be very interesting. Do you think there will be any issues around the OER that are available being accessible in terms of content for a South African audience, I am just wondering if the content of the OERs might have a western focus, but I guess that is where them being an OER is the benefit being remixed and repurposed. The question sprung to mind as you had really thought about developing a website that met the needs of its audience



[Grant Penny](#)

12:14am 29 January 2015 [Permalink](#)

Hi there Matthew,

Thank you for your comment. You raise an important issue. In developing the website, I included three OER textbooks from a South African OER organization (they have at least a dozen), however through this searching process it was apparent that there are very few (relative) SA made OERs. Although this will probably slow down the content uploaded to the site, it is also the very reason the site was created - to create a place for SA OERs. The aim is that a website like this will become a hub for the creation of SA OERs and remixing of Western-focused OERs as the industry grows, and hopefully spur some local growth itself.

In a nutshell, yes I do think it will be a problem, but this problem is also the problem the website aims to solve, so it isn't too large a concern, rather a space for opportunity.



[Dave Martin](#)

12:56pm 2 February 2015 [Permalink](#)

Hi Grant this sounds like a potentially massive development. Are you focussing upon a

particular curriculum area in the first place? And are you be prioritising which of the 11 languages you will support?



[Grant Penny](#)

1:56pm 2 February 2015 [Permalink](#)

Hello Dave,

My main focus will be towards the national curriculum in South Africa, as appose to the numerous private offerings. However, given the difficulty in finding OER's that are SA made at the moment, anything that is of good relevance is acceptable. The main focus in the beginning will be on English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, and Zulu. This is due to demographics and chosen languages at school and university. I want to cover as many languages and subjects as possible, but I am approaching this project as a long term development that can steadily grow.



[Dave Martin](#)

6:26pm 2 February 2015 [Permalink](#)

Thanks Grant.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

3:23pm 9 February 2015 [Permalink](#)

Here are the comments and questions from your live presentation at the conference:

- ▶ I can see how this website can address a lot of the problems - what is the current government policy regarding mobile devices?
- ▶ quality assurance might be a challenge but community of practice can help
- ▶ what about dropbox limits if this become successful? data sharing is always a problem
- ▶ How do you plan to get the word out about the site to get more people to use it?
- ▶ might be good to review the OER hub which documents across the world quality of OERs
- ▶ there is some new research coming out next week about risk online for children and the north south divide. Will share when see it
- ▶ Focus on maths would be a good place to start in SA <5% pass maths
- ▶ There is a strong OER movement in South Africa - might be worth contacting some of the universities there
- ▶ Moderation of forums? Do you see a social dimension as making the sharing of OERs more effective?
- ▶ Do you think the social dimension will encourage or discourage? might contributors prefer to be anonymous
- ▶ Is it just you making decisions about content? The project I am involved is bogged down by a disagreements about what is suitable.
- ▶ Also market thru the MAODE alumni and ask them to use their networks to market?



[Grant Penny](#)

7:32am 13 February 2015 [Permalink](#)

Thank you for posting the questions, Simon. I responded to them on this blog page:

<https://maodestudent.wordpress.com/post-presentation-responses/>

Many thanks,

Grant.



[Samantha Marks](#)

1:22pm 17 February 2015 [Permalink](#)

Grant - how a look at the discussions and debates

here: <https://storify.com/nickanstead/children-s-rights-in-the-digital-age>

It focuses in on childrens risks, but wants to view through lens of childrens rights. Global south tends to be mobile first...therefore risks may be different.



[Grant Penny](#)

11:54pm 18 February 2015 [Permalink](#)

Thank you very much, Sam. Some good disucssions to ponder over for the TMA.

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