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Does freely available mean freely accessible?

Student Dissertation

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MON: Does freely available mean freely accessible? (Penny James)

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Facilitating access to educational opportunities for all those who wish to use them is a central value of open educational practice. Although open educational resources are made available for use free of charge, financial constraints are not the only barriers preventing access to educational resources. Disabled users often face challenges accessing and using resources that have been made freely available. This may be because the original design for the material did not include consideration of accessibility, or because resources made available using open licenses (for example Creative Commons licenses) have been edited and redistributed by a variety of users. In this way, materials may become more or less accessible over time, even as they become more readily available.

By focusing this project on the diverse needs of disabled users I do not mean to suggest that resources that remain inaccessible to particular groups are without value. Indeed, insisting on a one-size fits all approach may well hinder creativity and may prevent the release and use of educationally valuable resources. However, consideration of the needs of different groups when designing open educational resources is critical to ensure that these materials may be as widely used as possible. This may include the production of alternative versions of the same resource, for example audio transcripts describing animations to enable use by those with visual impairments.

Although some research into the needs of disabled users of open educational resources has been done, several key uncertainties remain. These include:

- (1) In what ways do disabled users seek open educational resources? (i.e. what are their search strategies, and which search tools do they use?)
- (2) Do disabled users use open educational resources in the same way as non-disabled users? (i.e. do they use the same platforms and technologies? If they use alternative platforms, does this alter or limit the usability of the resources?)
- (3) Following on from uncertainty (2), how are the requirements of disabled users considered at the design stage of the development of open educational resources?
- (4) Would resources developed to meet the accessibility requirements of disabled users meet the needs of, and be acceptable to, non-disabled users?

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[Catherine Penny James](#)
22 January 2019

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In order to fully consider these questions, it is first necessary to understand disabled users' experiences of Open Educational Resources. In this presentation I will describe the findings of a survey into disabled users' experiences. The findings will be presented in the context of existing research, and suggestions for further addressing research uncertainties will be considered.

Extra content

Poster Accessibility Statement

This poster has been made using text and animation rendered as an mp4 file. Both the text and animation are simple, with black text or images on white background. This level of contrast is intended to be suitable for as wide an audience as possible. Although there is background music, this does not contribute to the information the poster communicates; the format is therefore suitable for those with difficulty hearing. There is no need to scroll or type, other than pressing the play button, thus ensuring the format is as accessible as possible for those with disabilities affecting their dexterity.

This poster is not fully accessible to those with visual impairment. For this reason, the alternative format is an audio (mp3) file describing the poster. A transcript of the audio file is included below. In addition to users with restricted vision, this format may also be of use for those for whom the animations and relatively fast moving text are not suitable.

Transcript of mp3 file (*NB the mp3 file cannot be attached to Cloudworks*)

Screen 1:

Speech bubble with "Free for all?" written in it. More text is underneath the speech bubble; this says "Or not?" in brackets.

Screen 2:

A box, with "Open Educational Resources" written in it as a title. Inside the box, it says: "intended for all – but not always accessible to all".

Screen 3:

There is an animation of a notebook. To one side there is text. The text reads: "How do disabled users experience OERs? How do I make my OER accessible?"

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Screen 4:

Animation with moving stars

Screen 5:

Text; this reads: "Find out: Monday February 18th, 21:00 GMT... H818 Online Conference" and then includes a internet address. The web address is: <https://tinyurl.com/y7ax3quf>

Screen 6:

Animation with clapper board.

Screen 7:

Text; this reads: "Thank you"



[Catherine Penny James](#)

09:42 on 6 March 2019

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Embedded Content

Animated poster

[Animated poster](#)

added by [Catherine Penny James](#)

Insights from a closer look a data from the OER Research Hub

[Insights from a closer look a data from the OER Research Hub](#)

added by [Catherine Penny James](#)

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Contribute

Discussion (13)

Links (0)

Academic References (0)



[Munir Moosa Sadruddin](#)

9:25am 29 January 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hello Penny

I am inspired by the topic you have chosen. Besides teaching, I do social work for children battling cancer, disabled children, etc. I agree that the resources designed and freely available is not always easy to access by the disabled learner. I have the following question: Do you think to make an audio transcript to all the resources need financial resources? I am curious to learn about your target population and which category if disabled you are particularly focusing on?

Munir



[Samantha Bennett](#)

3:09pm 3 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Penny

I'm intrigued by your abstract and look forward to your presentation. Are you presenting findings from a survey which you have conducted yourself? Is it research into a specific area of disability? Are you producing a paper for your project output?



[patrick shearer](#)

10:28pm 3 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Penny,

This is an interesting topic - especially in the context of this OU unit. It was one of the aspects that i didnt really consider for TMA02 and when i did i felt that i had underestimated the entire concept. Perhaps its because i made the assumption that technological development would make for better facilitation for disabled people. Perhaps also because i was finding it tough enough to access oer - never mind disabled people. It will be interesting to find out if disabled users are actually interested at all - and how much consideration has been given to them when the resource was actually designed.



[Kelly Williams](#)

6:08pm 9 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Penny,

This topic is of professional interest to me and not one I've explored too far as my students are FE SEN. I've been looking at freely available edtech tools. Nonetheless, there are parallels with your project and each of the questions you ask of OER could also relate to tools.

Your mention of 'diverse needs' is certainly a salient point. In the use of Trello I've been observing some of it can be fiddly for students using touchscreens with low hand control, difficult to drag cards, very small selection buttons, too easy to randomly archive cards (although they are usually easy to get back as the system documents all actions) and no option to change font sizes...I could go on. Accessibility is not the main driver for the

project but I'm taking notes nonetheless. I intend to get in touch with Trello after the project to inform them of the findings.

Have you approached any OER providers? How have you got on discussing accessibility?

All the best with your presentation - I'll be in the audience!



[Catherine Penny James](#)

6:54pm 10 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Manir

Thank you for your comments and questions :)

"Do you think to make an audio transcript to all the resources need financial resources?"

For TMA02 I made an audiofile to accompany my poster using a free service online. (I can't link to it, as the pages we can link to are limited!) I used this because I didn't want to record myself reading it out, but this is another free/cheap way to do it using a smartphone. I think that for longer and more complex sources than my poster then there may well be a cost element, yes.

"I am curious to learn about your target population and which category if disabled you are particularly focusing on?"

My survey is very open so as not to exclude anyone (and to get as much data as possible). Also, I think part of the problems disabled users face is that they are "categorised" by resource designers. I am trying to directly ask what they need.



[Catherine Penny James](#)

6:56pm 10 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Samantha

Thank you for your questions!

Yes, I have sent round a survey on Twitter. I will also be using some data collected by a research group at the OU a couple of years ago. I am producing a paper (although it is all still far from complete!)

I am not targeting a specific category of users - instead I am trying to draw attention to the diversity of needs :)



[Catherine Penny James](#)

7:01pm 10 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Patrick

Thank you for your comments. I think it is very difficult to address the needs of some groups of users from outside that experience. I chose this project because I have

rheumatoid arthritis affecting my hands and am dependent on various adapted bits of kit to use a computer. Some of these just don't work well with digital resources. (In fact, the OU has recently redesigned many of their module websites - which now do not work with Dragon for mac!)

In terms of being interested, for me the interest came from the frustration at not being able to do things. I think those who are interested are therefore a self selected group - maybe with more people who have had difficulties...!



[Catherine Penny James](#)

7:04pm 10 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Kelly

Thank you for your comments. I have to admit I have never been able to get on with Trello - for precisely the reasons you describe (although my colleagues love it, and I can see that it has the potential to be a very powerful tool).

I haven't approached any OER providers. My main focus has been to try and engage disabled users - or would be users. The survey results will be published in a paper on the blog (hopefully in time!) - and I hope that the findings could then be disseminated to those who design OERs.



[Phill Grimes](#)

12:27am 13 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

We have some good support for accessibility at the college with key people driving training and information, so this project adds more answers to serving our disabled students better. I feel we are still a little behind in incorporating these features into our digital strategy and use of G suite for education.



[Phill Grimes](#)

11:20pm 13 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Accessibility is a weakness for me - so this presentation and project will be most interesting.

I feel that some colleges do it well, and others not so.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

11:01am 19 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Hi Penny

Well done on a great presentation! Here is a summary of the comments and questions you received following your presentation (including those you may have addressed verbally). Please respond in whatever way you choose - I suspect you may wish to deal with the first few in one response!

Best wishes

Simon

- ▶ How did you find/engage your participants?
- ▶ What are the biggest barriers to disabled students from accessing OER resources?
- ▶ Did you use a particular statistics package to analyse the data?
- ▶ What age range?
- ▶ Disabled students allowance (if still around ?) should help some with hardware and EHC plans up to 25 possibly but it seems there is a big shortfall with older people buying expensive equipment.
- ▶ the browser companies are making it so hard for all designers/users



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

8:15am 28 February 2019 [Permalink](#)

Many Congratulations Penny! Your presentation has been voted by delegates to be one of the most effective of the H818 Online Conference 2019 and you are officially one of our H818 Presentation Star Open Badge Winners! Please see how to Apply for your Badge here: <http://cloudworks.ac.uk/badge/view/33>

Well done!

Simon

H818 Conference Organiser



[Catherine Penny James](#)

5:46pm 5 March 2019 [Permalink](#)

Thanks, Simon.

Re the questions:

(1) In the first part of my project, the respondents were part of a wider project by the OER hub - so I was not involved in data collection. In the second part, I used twitter - with hashtags selected to be noticed by those with interests in OE and issues relating to accessibility for disabled educators and students.

(2) This is a difficult question to answer. From the OER hub data, access to hardware and the internet seems to be a significant barrier. From my twitter respondents, problems with making different bits of hardware and software function together seems to be the biggest headache. *(The latter is certainly my own biggest problem!)

(3) The analyses I did were all simple descriptive statistics, easily carried out in excel

(4) > 90% respondents were over 18

(5) DSA is certainly useful in the UK (and has no age limit). Its use for buying equipment is restricted in that applicants have to pay the first £200 themselves - a significant barrier for many. It is also a UK only solution; access to technology wrt OERs is a worldwide problem.

(6) I agree!

Contribute to the discussion

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