Chapter 106
Toward an Open Empowered Learning Model of Pedagogy in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will explore some of the emerging trends in higher education worldwide brought by opening up education, including open educational resources (OER), open educational practices (OEP) and massive open online courses (MOOCs). These trends are transforming and challenging the traditional values and structures of universities, including curriculum design, pedagogies, and approaches to recognise and accredit learning assisted by OEP. We will also reflect on ways in which OEP, open ecosystems and the recognition of open learning experiences can further support learners, educators and educational institutions. In doing so, we will revise and re-work a learner centred model (Smyth, 2011) to incorporate some of the current transformation brought by openness. The revised model, called Open Empowered Learning Model, will prompt discussion on alternative ways in which learners, educators and educational institutions could take full advantage of these new trends.

INTRODUCTION

Open educational practice (OEP) constitutes the adoption of open educational resources (OER) within open learning ecologies (Open Education Quality Initiative, 2011). We will further discuss and expand the OEP concept in this chapter, but before we continue, we would like to define open educational resources, which is another important concept used throughout this work. Since first being coined by UNESCO in

2002, the term, open educational resources, has evolved to meet the fast pace of the movement and the diverse contexts in which it has now been used (Bossu, Bull, & Brown, 2012). According to the White Paper published by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in November 2013, "the idea behind Open Educational Resources (OER) is simple but powerful — educational materials made freely and legally available on the Internet for anyone to reuse, revise, remix and redistribute" (The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2013, p. 3).

We hope to add to the current investigation of openness by exploring learner-centred pedagogies (Smyth, 2011) through an open lens. This pedagogical model has influenced our thinking so we will use it as a starting point for discussion. The essence of the model in the constructivist domain explored the possible interactions between learners and their peers, the teacher, the content and technology. The intent was to show how synchronous communications tools could and should be chosen for their fit-to-purpose within a learning design intended to engage learners and to stimulate their autonomy as learners. To achieve this, the model used different lenses: learners, knowledge and connectivity. The intersections between lenses highlight synergies in the model between:

- **Knowledge and Connectivity:** The possibilities for learning using appropriate e-learning tools to serve learning needs.
- **Learners and Knowledge:** How learners could be encouraged to and have freedom to navigate around their existing knowledge to acquire and build new knowledge.
- **Learners and Connectivity:** Possibilities for learners to choose from available e- and m-learning technologies to deeply engage in peer-to-peer learning and transformation (Smyth, 2011).

In common with open practice philosophies, learners take precedence on an assumption that the learning design is developmental in expectations for cognitive load, knowledge and skills acquisition, and growth of learner autonomy and locus of control (Smyth, 2011). The locus of control for learning is shifted from the teacher to the learner/s with a hope for transformative learning:

The role of the teacher as facilitator requires an approach of working with learners to promote learner-learner collaboration and knowledge building rather than teaching to them in a teacher-to-learner transmission of knowledge. (Smyth, 2011, p. 114)

Higher education is now immersed in new waves of online technologies, approaches and offerings with the latest being:

- Massive open online courses (MOOCs) which tend to be courses/units or part of a unit purposely developed to be delivered to thousands of learners across the world (Wappett, 2012). The large majority of MOOCs, however, use traditional teaching approaches of knowledge transmission and do not provide clear articulations or pathways towards degrees (McGreal, 2013).
- The open educational practice movement where a proliferation of free and open training and development courses, together with a wide range of educational resources are available to anyone globally (Open Education Quality Initiative, 2011).

What is still missing in our view is a new approach (dare we suggest an open approach) to pedagogy which focuses on learning by the learner for the learner in formal and informal settings.

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