

Chapter 13

Breaching the Paywall: Increasing Access, Recognition, and Representation Using Open Educational Resources


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ABSTRACT

This chapter informs readers of recent developments with open educational resources (OERs) as well as the various advantages and challenges to the use of open access materials and repositories. This chapter explores examples of OER usage for instruction and research and discusses digital and instructional media relevant to open pedagogy and the technology-enabled democratization of learning. Finally, the chapter concludes with suggestions for advocacy of greater open access to benefit national and international dissemination of knowledge and the increase of societal use.

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INTRODUCTION

In Article I of the United States Constitution, Congress is given the right to make laws which “...promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries” (U.S. Constitution, Section 8). Inherent in this protection is a paradoxical relationship between private ownership and the public good. The framers sought to encourage progress for the public good but chose to do that by an act which limits the usefulness of new knowledge and technologies through copyright law. Today’s educators and researchers are in an ongoing struggle to advance equity of access to educational materials within that legal topography--breaching the paywalls surrounding educational resources and research. For instance, the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top program rewards schools for their efforts to improve student success, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) advocates for improved access and services for students who need them. On the international stage, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) has published a resolution on Open Educational Resources (OERs) designed to encourage policies of inclusivity and equity on a global scale. OERs are in line with the mission of both American educational policies and international efforts.

OERs, by definition, are those resources which are open or available to educators, learners, or researchers without payment. Specifically, the authors use the definition of OERs developed by Lambert (2018):

Open Education is the development of free digitally enabled learning materials and experiences primarily by and for the benefit and empowerment of non-privileged learners who may be under-represented in education systems or marginalised in their global context. Success of social justice aligned programs can be measured ... by the extent to which they enact redistributive justice, recognitive justice and/or representational justice (p. 239).

In other words, OERs increase access, recognition, and representation for populations of learners on state, national, and international levels.

Lambert (2018) described OERs as tools for redistributive, recognitive, and representative justice. In terms of redistributive justice, OERs provide access to learners who cannot afford resources due to their socioeconomic circumstances. OERs create a more inclusive educational system by expanding opportunities to those who faced barriers to access for high quality learning materials. Specifically, access to materials is not reserved for students with the most monetary resources. For educators, Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter (2018) further argue that OERs transform the inequitable structure of education by requiring innovation and a mechanism for sharing resources with others.

In regard to recognitive justice, OERs expand the opportunities for socio-cultural diversity in instructional curriculum (Lambert, 2018; Tang & Bao, 2020). In particular, “images, case studies, and knowledges of women, First Nations people” which have been left out of curricula can be incorporated using OERs (p. 228). This type of censorship and exclusion dispossesses students of a diversity of thought and culture. The use of OERs have even been referred to as a way to decolonize the curriculum (Adam, 2020). For instance, sources can be translated into local languages, as needed, avoiding an expensive process when translating copyrighted materials (Karakaya & Karakaya, 2020). Furthermore, sources can be remixed or edited to critically challenge hegemonic paradigms (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018).

Representational justice is achieved through the use of OERs by allowing oppressed people to have a voice (Lambert, 2018). In other words, OERs allow for more narratives from people who have histori-

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