

# Chapter 10

## Open Educational Resources and the Impact of MERLOT on Transnational Education

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter discusses the impact of Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) Open Educational Resources (OERs) on transnational education. MERLOT is a managed collection with links to learning materials and resources. MERLOT resources, as they relate to open educational resources, are described. OERs, or freely shared education resources with multiple users, are defined with a historical perspective. The chapter focuses on further defining OERs and comparing and contrasting OERs with proprietary software. The types of OERs and the significance of initiatives, such as MIT and MERLOT that make OERs available internationally are discussed. Finally, the opportunities and challenges for the use of OERs in global learning are addressed. Solutions, recommendations, future directions, and conclusions are discussed.*

### INTRODUCTION

MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching) (<http://www.merlot.org>) is a managed collection of tens of thousands of learning resources; most are Open Educational Resources (OERs). Originally, MERLOT was designed to provide quality peer

reviewed learning resources for higher education, but its popularity grew quickly; it now serves instructors and students at all levels of education. The collection includes learning resources written in many world languages and it includes a translator to assist users worldwide. Because the collection has been adopted by individual users and universities throughout the world, it is impacting transnational education and distance education.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0206-9.ch010

OERs are educational resources that can be shared and adapted by a community of users for non-commercial uses. OERs grew out of the Open Education (OE) movement, which can be traced to the late '60's and early '70's (Hassett & Weisberg, 1972; Tallboy & Shore, 1973). It signaled a paradigm shift in education with the transition of the formal teacher-centered classroom to that of the less formal student centered learning setting. Proponents of OE discussed the importance of disseminating education to greater numbers of people and providing education for free or at reduced costs. The interest of open education in higher education sparked when the Open University enrolled 25,000 students in 1971 (Howe, 1976). The Open University targeted students who were unable to attend a traditional university because of lower income or geographic location. It used late night television broadcasts, residential schools, and science kits that were mailed to the student homes as learning resources. The concept of OE is based upon several assumptions:

*...people want to learn; learn only which as meaning for them, learn best without fear, threats, failure, and fabricated assignments, learning not always in ordered logical processes, but often in fragments which are finally integrated in one's own unique personal system; know what they want to learn and only need someone to act as a resource where direction is blocked by lack of experience (Campbell, 1976, p. 18).*

## **BACKGROUND**

Wiley (2000) made a significant contribution to the OE movement when he initiated discussions about the use of "learning objects" that could be accessed simultaneously and reused in multiple contexts. Wiley was a visionary who saw how

internet access and shared learning resources could transform education. Wiley saw learning objects as "poised to become *the* instructional technology of online learning" (p. 15).

Several organizations, including MERLOT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation started the Open Education Resource (OER) movement in the late 1970's (Campbell, 1976). In 1997, the California State University Center for Distributed Learning developed shared access to free learning resources, MERLOT. Later in 2000, faculty on discipline specific editorial boards identified review criteria and began the process of conducting peer reviews for online learning resources. Today, it has almost one hundred thousand members and over thirty thousand learning resources.

On April 4, 2001, MIT announced that it was going to share all of its courses on the Internet for use and reuse without any charges (MIT OpenCourseWare, 2011a). MIT's move to open its entire course to the world shocked the traditional education system. In the spirit of open education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the term, OER, at a meeting in 2002 (UNESCO, 2002).

UNESCO defined OERs as "The open provision of educational resources, enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial uses" (UNESCO, 2002). The Hewlett Foundation defines OER as:

*... high-quality, openly licensed, online educational materials that offer an extraordinary opportunity for people everywhere to share, use, and reuse knowledge. They also demonstrate great potential as a mechanism for instructional innovation as networks of teachers and learners share best practices (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2011).*

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