

The Big Shift - from resources to use – a commentary

Professor Ehlers has hit the nail on the head: “actually taking someone else’s OER, understanding it, deconstructing it and then re-contextualizing it is a complex cognitive process”. And it does require much strengthening of capacity of potential users. Perhaps this has introduced a barrier to wider adoption of OER’s in educational practice?

I have another view: are OER’s really educational resources? My experience in developing countries in South Asia and sub Saharan Africa leads me to think that teachers and learners view something as an educational resource if it can be “aligned” to or “captured” in a curricular framework. In the absence of such an alignment, an OER is regarded as at best a learning resource or even as just another information resource. The presumed continuity between information-learning-educational resources needs to be checked more closely.

In my understanding, addressing the capacity strengthening needs in relation to OER takes precedence over many other concerns in widening the use of OER’s. Sometime back, when I was asked to support an OER capacity strengthening workshop for distance educators in the Asia-Pacific region, my colleagues and I realized that not much OER is available for OER training. There is a need to foster a community of workers who would contribute materials for this purpose with encouraging re-use as the focus. This meta OER and its re-use may be studied closely to gain further insights on how OER in general can be used far more widely than in the present.

Policy makers in charge of institutions rightly have concerns about the quality of reusable materials from the OER realm. This takes me back to the point about alignment with curricular framework(s). I believe this is in a sense a solved issue in terms of software, and I have come across a trial in India among the computer science departments in the Indian Institute of Technology system where a particular course has been developed as reusable learning objects inside a curriculum framework, and such objects move freely to another framework if the “tagging” of resources is adequately done. In other words, the software experts have reduced curricular fit as an indexing/tagging issue.

I believe we can consider concerted efforts on both these fronts using the simple and effective methods by which engineers on the Internet Engineering Task Force have created major problem-solving opportunities.