SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION WEEK
23 OCT TO 28 OCT 2010
(BY ULF-DANIEL EHLERS)

TOPIC I: OER BUSINESS MODEL AND STRATEGY

- There is much we can learn from the business models and approaches around the free software movement. Not only from the perspective of financial sustainability -- but more importantly the culture and practice of open collaboration. That said, (and I suspect that Steve would agree with me) we need to think about OER within a larger system and how we can nurture the development of a sustainable open education ecosystem (not only restricted to economic sustainability.)

- Apart from the Wikimedia Foundation -- I'm not aware of many (read any) mainstream OER projects which are economically self-sustaining or scalable yet. The BCcampus <http://wikieducator.org/BCcampus/Case_study> model is an interesting one because it is funded by government (a model worth replicating and scaling up around the world). The NROC<http://www.montereyinstitute.org/nroc/>project run by Monterey Institute for Technology and Education was pretty close to achieving sustainability through an institutional membership model.

TOPIC 2: MAKING THE SHIFT TO PRACTICES

- If, as with the BIG Shift that ULF describes of focusing on best practices, open education moves more towards understanding how best to create/share/reuse OER with the goal of developing collaborative processes that are better (i.e. quality and/or cost) than traditional methods for producing educational resources, open education advocates will be able to better promote OER within many educational institutions.
- I'm reminded of an important quote from Steven Weber's _The Success of Open Source_ where he writes, "the essence of open source is not the software. It is the process by which software is created" (56). To me that "essence" is   how open source software and content projects like Wikipedia are collaboratively created/modified/revised/improved over time by groups of people.

TOPIC 3: BARRIERS FOR MAKING THE SHIFT

- **Culture Shift:** For us the whole idea of OERs would require a paradigm shift in CULTURE: the culture of education practiced here. Lack of access to technology, or a phobia of technology, is only a small excuse for the lack of awareness of the possibilities of Education For All through open resources.
- **Encourage active and autonomous learning:** The problem here is more serious, as a shift into these new models of learning suggests giving up of all values and traditions that are set deep into our psyche. In India, for instance, for centuries we have followed the *Guru-Shishya parampara -* the teacher* *- disciple tradition, where a culture of silence is encouraged, and critical questioning is frowned upon. No amount of training or theory have been able to substantially shake off this deep rooted belief that a teacher imparts knowledge, and

a student learns from accepting this knowledge as given. Questioning of an authoritative version is considered a sign of vanity and usually leads to disillusionment.

- **Not the same trust in an open model:** In my university (Gauhati University), we have an Institute of Open and Distance Learning (IDOL) that has been successfully running post graduate degree and diploma courses through a blended model (traditional and open courseware), but most of its clientele comprises 'outsiders' - people who did not get admission into regular courses on merit. Professional courses are also popular, but somehow a certficate from an open system does not get the same weightage as a regular one. The point is that this system is still on the periphery - and it is unlikely to become mainstream very soon.
- **Access:** Assuming that OERs are accessible to all people would be, however, neglecting the reality. In fact, most of OERs, if not all, are online and the majority of learners and teachers on African continent, for example, still have no access to the Internet. Statistics published in June 2010 show that the Internet penetration on this continent is only 10.9% and only 4.1% in my country, Rwanda (see http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm).

TOPIC 4: MOTIVATORS FOR MAKING THE SHIFT (FACTORS WHICH WOULD DRIVE CHANGE)

- **Awareness raising:** awareness raising is the first step towards popularizing OERs as best practices, followed by a sustainable model that is accepted by government, implemented in university, and accepted by industry.
- There are many OSS tools and technologies that will allow OERs to be stored, indexed for accessibility, and updated for currency, on LANs and campus wide networks. And in fact, for a number of reasons, it would be beneficial to store resources locally to the greatest extent possible: access is faster, preservation through multiple copies is assured, local mashups would be easier to produce, and it would be possible to offer consistent and high quality indexing of resources, which in turn would result in better access. I like to refer to the broad concept as "substituting storewidth for bandwidth." I would be happy expand on this concept in greater detail and discuss some of the available OSS tools if anyone on the list is interested.

TOPIC 5: REASONS FOR OER

- I suggest that we are dealing with a systemic problem in higher education -- and OER is a plausible solution. We need now need decisive leadership and action in education. In some respects it's like the environment -- if we do nothing, the problem will get progressively worse. For the past decade, internationally the percentage of government funding for publicly funded post-secondary institutions has been decreasing combined with increases in student fees which in many cases have recorded a larger rate of increase than the corresponding national inflation index. In this regard, the economic models of education are fundamentally broken and these models are not going to be sustainable in the long term, especially if we aim to widen access to learning opportunities. The industrial education models and systems are not adequately efficient for today's world -- particularly in terms of what we can achieve with today's technology. 4 Billion of the worlds 6 billion people are still under-served educationally speaking when measured against the educational requirements of a knowledge society. The tragedy is that given an open web combined with open content licensing we have a plausible solution to respond to these concerns. The OER Foundation has spent a little time thinking about strategy<http://wikieducator.org/OERF:Planning>, sustainability and business models for OER -- I'm not suggesting that we have got this right or that we have e perfect solution. However, these strategies are openly licensed and you are free to adapt,

modify and improve on these in the spirit of open philanthropy (you are even free to sell these strategies if you can find a buyer).

TOPIC 6: PROJECTS/ LINKS

- The eGranary service of the Widernet Project (www.widernet.org): this subscription service consists of a hard drive distributed to participating institutions that contains educational resources, including the entire MIT OCW material.

- The Open Learning Exchange (www.ole.org): a service distributing resources to support universal primary education.

- SolarNet (www.solarnet.org): a project developing a prototype self-contained LAN that include solar panels to provide power.

- It's intended for another contenxt, but I think the JISC Matserlist of open access activities http://misc.jisc.ac.uk/scholarly_communications_handbook/cms/content/masterlist-actions would be of some use to readers here.

TOPIC 7: CASES

- **AVU Open Courses:** The African Virtual University www.avu.org , in partnership with the African Development Bank and 10 African countries have developed 73 modules of Maths, Physics, Chemistry, biology, Teacher Education Professional courses, and ICT in education. See sample modules at http://www.avu.org/The-AVU-OER-Repository/oer-avu-repository.html . The 73 modules are structured as 4 Bachelor of Education in Math and Sciences. They are now offered as degree, diploma and certificate programs at participating universities http://www.avu.org/Consortium-Programs/consortium-programs.html and as AVU own programs http://www.avu.org/Certificate/Diploma/certificate-diploma.htm A collaborative approach was used to develop the modules; the authors of the modules as well as peer reviewers were selected from 12 universities in the participating 10 countries. Open content resources were used to enrich the existing programs of the participating universities, all modules are now published using a creative commons incense, meaning that they can be used, modified, and the modified one can be submitted to AVU for further sharing.
- **AVU Quality assurance framework:** See http://www.avu.org/Teacher-Education-Programme/design-development-quality-assurance-framework.html You may want to know that each of the modules was peer reviewed. We also put in place a quality assurance governance body, the Teacher Education Advisory Committee who was responsible of ensuring the quality of the program. See term of references of the committee http://www.avu.org/Teacher-Education-Programme/formation-teacher-education-advisory-committee.html

OPAL: Make the shift from Resources to Practices!

The Open Educational Quality Initiative (OPAL) is a new quality initiative which helps educational professionals, organisational leaders, learners, and policy makers to make use of open educational resources (OER) in the best possible way. OPAL provides quality guidelines and self-assessment tools which show how existing educational practices in higher education and adult education can be made increasingly open in order to better integrate OER and improve the quality of learning experiences. The initiative is the result of a partnership between organizations including UNESCO, the International Council for Open and Distance education, the European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning, and a number of universities. On the basis of analysis of international case studies, the OPAL Initiative has concluded that it is necessary to move from a paradigm of providing better access to open educational resources to a new paradigm of open educational practices in order to guarantee the uptake of OER in education. The OPAL Initiative will provide tools including a good practice case box of good open educational practices, a register of international champions of open educational practices, quality guidelines and a self-assessment concept for organisations, individuals, teaching practice and policy. (More on www.oer-quality.org)

OPAL: How can you be part?

The Open Educational Quality Initiative will develop all tools and concepts in accordance with a strict open consultation philosophy. Through open consultation events, the opinion and critical analysis of all stakeholders within the open education community will be sought (www.oer-quality.org). In addition, OPAL will initiate a consultative group to look at quality of open educational practices. This group of high level experts, consisting of representatives of selected champions in the field of open educational practices, will take the lead in developing a roadmap to facilitate the adoption of open educational practices within policy and practice, in turn leading to better and more innovative educational processes in higher education and adult education.

OPAL Consultation Events 2010

- **1st Consultative Group meeting** at the EFQUEL Innovation Forum, Lisbon, Portugal, SEPT 8th-10th, 2010
- **2nd Consultative Group meeting** at the OpenEd Conference, Barcelona, Spain, NOV 5th, 2010
- **Research Workshop on Open Educational Practices**: Workshop on quality, innovation through open educational practices, UNESCO Headquarter, Paris, NOV 8th-9th,2010
- **Official Launch of the Open Educational Practice Initiative** at Online Educa Berlin, Germany, 1st DEC 2010

How can you benefit?

- OPAL goes beyond building provision and access to OER and makes recommendations based on selected and validated examples of how best to use OER in practice, improve quality and innovate teaching and learning.
- OPAL combines the development of guidelines, web-based self-assessment tools and in-depth research with an international consultation group, aggregates all tools into a roadmap, and mainstreams quality and innovation as important topics for open educational resources initiatives and repositories.
- OPAL is grounded in the international OER community and provides web-based self-assessment tools for open educational practices, guidelines, and a register for champion institutions in Europe and beyond.

- Organizations and individuals are given the opportunity to submit their own examples of best practice to OPAL and will be provided with clear peer-review analysis of these practices

OPAL Partners

- UNESCO
- International Council for Open and Distance Education - ICDE
- EFQUEL
- University of Duisburg-Essen
- Aalto University
- Catholic University Portugal
- Open University UK

Interested? Contact OPAL @ www.oer-quality.org

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