

Frydenberg and Matkin, “Open Textbooks: Why? What? How? When?”

Read the article at <https://edtechbooks.org/-Vqgb>

Background

Educators, authors, administrators of open-source based organizations, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders in the open textbook movement, gathered in Newport Beach, CA in 2007 to explore four basic research questions:

1. Why do we need open textbooks?
2. What are open textbooks (how are they defined)?
3. How will open textbooks be produced and then used?
4. And finally, when will open textbooks be available in sufficient quantity and quality to have a positive impact?

Key Points

1. Why open textbooks? College textbook costs are skyrocketing and open textbooks are one solution on how to make college more affordable. The K-12 textbook process is fraught with politics and bureaucracy, so it is not addressed in the same manner, although open textbooks can save public schools money as well. In developing countries the key is access to high quality materials, which open textbooks provide.
2. What are open textbooks (how are they defined)? The discussion revealed several pairs of new dimensions to consider:
 - K-12/Higher Education: The contexts are so different that any discussion has to be defined in one or the other of these contexts.
 - Developed Countries/Undeveloped Countries: Developed countries have resources whereas undeveloped countries can benefit more readily from access to OER in general.
 - Top Down/Bottom up: Top down – I’ll tell you what is good for you/Bottom-up – Let me tell you what I want.
 - Course/Reference: Will the OER be a part and parcel course or just supplementary reference materials?
 - Core Content/Service Mode: If you build it they will come vs. including pedagogy.
 - High Tech/User Capabilities: Media rich tech may enhance user experience in developed countries but limit the ability of those in undeveloped countries.

Additionally, barriers to the use of OER, include initial cost and sustaining resources, inertia, technology, distribution and discoverability, lack of quality standards, intellectual property and digital rights management and politics, which must be considered in the broader context of adoption of OER.

- How will open textbooks be produced and then used?
 - Quality: Various groups are trying to address the issue of quality by implementing standards, a rating system, crowd-sourcing, and filters.
 - Accessibility – in terms of software it should be on an open, modular, flexible platform and usable at varying levels of capacity.
 - Sustainability – a sustainability plan is a critical part of any OER project. If it is not relevant or financially viable in a year, that needs to be considered.
 - Community and Convergence – funding typically comes from institutions or community in order to maintain sustainability.
- And finally, when will open textbooks be available in sufficient quantity and quality to have a positive impact? “When” is the appropriate question to ask, not if. It is important to situate OER within the existing framework of textbook publishers rather than to create tension between the two groups.

Next steps: Aside from additional funding, these five activities are essential in moving forward:

- Infrastructure capacity building by developing standards, enabling tools for interoperability, funding for discoverability, increasing institutional involvement and marketing the movement.
- Establishing a clearinghouse or network facilitator, which will decrease the redundancy of multiple entities building the same courses.
- Community formation, which is a crucial step, even if they are separate from institutions, such as the Open Education Consortium, formerly the Open CourseWare Consortium, which is separate from MIT.
- Funding and publicizing demonstration projects, including step by step best practices for easy replication so others can do the same thing in their own institutions and communities.
- Research – Foundations can bring together practitioners to discuss the biggest areas of concern and collaborate on research in those areas.

Minor improvements can be made that will help the movement make significant strides.

Discussion Questions

1. How can openness fit into the proprietary textbook model appropriately?
2. What are the benefits and drawbacks of viewing OER through the lens of the new dimensions above?
3. What are your top three ideas for overcoming the barriers of OER use?

Additional Resources

CK-12 Foundation <http://www.ck12.org/>

OpenStax College <https://edtechbooks.org/-TDnE>

Boundless <http://www.boundless.org/>

Open Textbook Library <https://edtechbooks.org/-ft>

College Open Textbooks <http://collegeopentextbooks.org/>



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