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European Network for Catalysing Open Resources in Education

Interview Series on 'Credentialing and OER'

Interview #6

Lorna Campbell

Lorna Campbell was closely involved in the large Open Educational Resources (OER) programme run by the Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc) and funded by The Higher Education Funding Council in England from 2009 to 2012. Over the past six years she has been a member of board of trustees of the Association for Learning Technology in the UK, which has a strategic commitment to openness, and a board member and Vice Chair of Wikimedia UK. She is currently the manager of the University of Edinburgh Open Education Resources Service, which provides support to staff and students to engage with the creation and use of open-licensed content.

Dai Griffiths is a Senior Research at the Research Institute for Innovation & Technology in Education (UNIR iTED), Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (UNIR).

Dai Griffiths. Do you think there are credentialing approaches and methodologies that can be applied to OERs, so that we can provide credentials for people's activity with them?

Lorna Campbell. Can I ask you to explain what you mean by credentialing in this context?

Dai Griffiths. In a sense, that is the question we want to answer in these interviews. Broadly, it's the relationship is between OER, assessment and the institutional processes of awards.

Lorna Campbell. We do have some, some interesting examples of what we might call 'open education in the curriculum'. Students are undertaking accredited projects and as part of that they are creating open education resources or open knowledge. About fourteen courses have 'Wikipedia in the curriculum' assignments, supported by the University of Edinburgh's 'Wikimedian in Residence', Ewan McAndrew. Undergraduate students or postgraduate masters' students work together, or on their own, to create Wikipedia articles as part of their assessed coursework. Some of these assignments have been running for about four years now, so there's quite a body of research and data about them. The students gain a lot of very valuable digital skills, like understanding how knowledge is created and mediated online, writing for public outreach, data synthesis, and referencing. Students have responded very positively because the open knowledge that is created is sustainable information. One of the examples we quite often cite is a student called Aine Kavanagh, who created a

Wikipedia article about a very common form of ovarian cancer, about four years ago. That article now has over 150,000 page views[1]. It's almost impossible to imagine another form of undergraduate assignment having that kind of international impact. We also have courses where students create OERs as part of their assignments, for example in the GeoSciences Outreach course, students co-create a reusable STEM teaching and engagement resource for a body outside the University. That could be a museum, it could be a Science Centre, it could be a community group, could be a primary school. Every summer student interns come and work with us in the OER Service and they take the GeoScience resources, check that the copyright clearance and align them to the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence. Then we share them on TES[2], because we believe in putting open content where teachers and users will find it. School teachers are not going to come directly to the University of Edinburgh to find teaching resources. We now have about 70, curriculum-assigned open education resources produced by our students, which are available free of charge. That collection of content won the 2021 Open Education Global Open Curation Award[3]

Dai Griffiths. Are there any examples of OERs that have assessment packaged up with them, as part of the resource?

Lorna Campbell. The schoolteacher resources have little assignments in them, but I'm not aware of many that would have assessments embedded in them. Something we do get a lot of in the university is academic blogging

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High-grade_serous_carcinoma
[2] https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources
[3] https://open.ed.ac.uk/oeglobal-open-curation-award/

assignments. One of our academics created an OER about rubrics for assessing academic blogging assignments. So we do things like that.

Alongside the OER Service, where I work, is the Online Course Production Service, which creates our MOOCs and free short online courses. Edinburgh are partners with the three main MOOC providers, FutureLearn, edX, and Coursera. We've produced about 90 MOOCs, since around 2014, which have been taken by over 4,000,000 learners. Many of them give you the option to pay for credentials on completion. We always make sure that the content that is created for these MOOCs is also available under open license, off the MOOC platform. We have our Open Media Bank that includes over a thousand videos that were created for our MOOCs, which have all been released under open licenses, so anyone can download and reuse them.

Dai Griffiths. So you have quite a clear separation between the production and management of resources, which is what you're looking after, and any use of those in a course or a standalone learning opportunity.

Lorna Campbell. Yes, though we absolutely encourage our colleagues to reuse content produced outside the University as well.

Dai Griffiths. Do you have a have a repository?

Lorna Campbell. No, we don't, and that was a strategic decision. On the basis of previous work and projects I'd been involved in, I was aware that OER repositories can be very hard to sustain. What tends to happen is you get a

block of funding to set the repository up, and frequently they become overcomplicated, the workflows are difficult and it's hard to sustain engagement, particularly once the funding dries up. This was something we were aware of way back when Jisc ran the UK OER program. What's interesting is that the resources created by that program that went into repositories vanished when the repositories were shut down. But we had also recommended as part of the technical strategy, that resources were put in multiple places, preferably places that were accessible on the web and had RSS feeds. As a result of that, there's a still a lot of content from that old program which you can find in YouTube and Flickr and places like that. In Edinburgh we do not have a single dedicated OER repository, instead, we view the web as our repository, and our strategy is to put resources where they can most usefully be found and used by other people. So, for example, sometimes that means Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons, sometimes it means TES resources if the resources are for schoolteachers.

We do have a dedicated media repository in the University, which is called Media Hopper Create[4]. Any media created by our staff or students goes there, and we've got literally thousands of open licensed pieces of media in there. Over the course of the pandemic, that figure shot up as people were creating more media. We also share 3D models on Sketchfab.

So that that's the approach that we take to managing open education resources. It does mean that we never see all the content created by our staff and students, there's too

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[4] https://media.ed.ac.uk/channel/Open%2BMedia%2BBank/

much of it for our small OER Service to keep track of. The OER Service is very much focused on copyright literacy and information literacy, to ensure that our staff, primarily, but also our students, understand how copyright works, and that they can create and share their resources with confidence under open licence. There are all kinds of things on the Creative Commons channel on the Open Media Bank [5] : interviews like this one, recorded lectures, projects, films, an enormously wide range of content. The way we view it is we have lots of different channels for different kinds of content and there are all kinds of people creating content and sharing it through these channels.

We identify nice examples of content and projects that have been going on in the university and showcase them on the Open.Ed website[6]. That's simply a WordPress Website which is the front face of the OER Service in the University. So that's the approach that we take, and, as I say, it was a strategic technical choice.

Dai Griffiths. So any kind of assessment or credentialing that makes use of those OERs is in the other service that you mentioned.

Lorna Campbell. That happens either in the on-campus courses as part of our student assignments or on the MOOC platforms.

Dai Griffiths. What are the barriers to credentialing through OER that you've experienced or observed? Is it inevitable that this is the way it's going to have to be, so that

we can't actually credentialise the resources directly?

Lorna Campbell. Well, the open education in the curriculum examples that we've talked about are accredited, and the contents that we produce for MOOCs are open education resources. We are also definitely seeing an increase of interest in open textbooks, which has been partially driven by the crisis in ebook pricing. You'll be aware that academic publishers are charging extortionate amounts of money for ebook licenses, far in excess of the costs of print books, and these licenses are massively restrictive in what you can do with the books. Libraries have been grappling with this for a long time, but particularly over the last couple of years. There's a lot of lobbying going on to try to put a cap on these fees. A by-product of this is that more people and more institutions are starting to look towards creating their own textbooks, and a number of universities have set up open presses over the last 18 months or so. Edinburgh has done it, UCL has done it, Sussex have done it, Galway have done it. These open presses are partly a response to this crisis in electronic textbook costs. It's going to be interesting to see how that develops over the next few years. We have created one exemplar open textbook here at Edinburgh on *The Fundamentals of Music Theory* [7] , where we reused existing content to create an open textbook that will be used on the on-campus course.

Dai Griffiths. What's holding that back?

Lorna Campbell. Well, partially lack of knowledge and expertise and infrastructure.

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[5] https://media.ed.ac.uk/category/Creative+Commons/48781431
[6] https://open.ed.ac.uk/
[7] https://books.ed.ac.uk/edinburgh-diamond/catalog/book/ed-9781912669226

But it's been picking up pace. I think that one of the things that's maybe held this area back in the UK, and indeed across Europe, is that we don't use textbooks in the same way as in North America. It's not the case that there is a single textbook for a course, that's not the way textbooks are used. There are usually multiple textbooks for a course and different bits of different textbooks will be used. Also, it tends to be the libraries that bear the brunt of textbook costs, rather than the students. That model is very, very different from North America, where open textbooks have really, really taken off.

Dai Griffiths. What are the barriers to the use of the OERs that you produce in teaching and courses?

Lorna Campbell. If there is a barrier, I think it is that there is still very much a craft approach to teaching. Teachers like to create their own resources, and that has been very much part of their professional identity. In creating their teaching, they create their own resources as well. I think that way of working is still very prevalent in higher education and there is an impetus to create everything from scratch rather than from reusing existing content. But we absolutely are seeing people reusing content that has been produced, for example, for MOOCs or whatever.

Dai Griffiths. Teachers have to do some assessment at the end of a course to certify that these people passed. Is there any sense that the teachers don't trust the alignment between the open education resources and their assessment?

Lorna Campbell. I'm not aware that has been a drawback. I have heard people talking about

this in North America, "this textbook doesn't meet the criteria for this particular course".

Dai Griffiths. But that's not the motivation that that's driving them to make their own resources, as far as you're concerned.

Lorna Campbell. Not really.

Dai Griffiths. What practical solutions and mitigations to barriers to success have you identified, and how can trust in credentialing learning through OER best be developed? What would you like to see happen at a policy level or a training level to make things better for you, and for the sector, to make the use of OER in courses more prevalent?

Lorna Campbell. We already have a dedicated Open Educational Resources Policy at the University of Edinburgh, which encourages colleagues to both create and use open education resources. We also have Lecture Recording and Virtual Classroom Policies. All these three policies are integrated, and they all reference each other, so we have quite a strong policy environment. When it comes to OER assignments, where we have students creating open content as part of their course assignments, I think there's a huge amount of potential. It's partially down to the capacity of our service to work with colleagues and the resource available to colleagues, in terms of time and bandwidth and all these other things, to redevelop assessments within their courses. I guess there's a time and resources constraint there.

Dai Griffiths. I'm getting the message all the way through that there's a separation of concerns between the production of OER and anything that's to do with credentials and assessment.

Lorna Campbell. No, not exactly. When a MOOC is being developed, a project team is created which involves the academics, media producers and the Online Course Production Service, including our instructional designers. They all work together to create the course, including the assessment and the instructional design. Then they will work with one of our partners, it could be FutureLearn, Coursera or EdX, depending on which one is most appropriate for the course in question. Our Online Course Production Team works with our partner to build the course on the platform. Students taking the course may choose to work through the assessments and pay for the credential etc. etc. The OER Service makes sure that the content created for that course can be shared under open license. So there's not a separation, everyone works together but everyone's got their own role in the process.

Dai Griffiths. Are the assessments themselves published in an open form?

Lorna Campbell. The assessments are usually available on the MOOC platform. What we tend to share under open license is the media content. I don't think we've actually shared the surrounding course content of a MOOC, though it's certainly something we're looking in to.

Dai Griffiths. So there's a model of 'Edinburgh produces OERs, that are used in courses on a MOOC platform, and then we get some income from the assessment'. Is that financially attractive to the university, and part of the reason why they drive forward the OER agenda?

Lorna Campbell. Yes and no. OER and MOOCs are both part of the much bigger open knowledge agenda at the University of Edinburgh. Dr Melissa Highton, Assistant Principal and Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services is the architect of the University's vision for OER and a champion of OER and open knowledge at senior management level within the institution. There's also our Wikimedian in Residence, who we work closely with. The Edinburgh Diamond open press and the open data repository are managed and supported by the University Library. So all the parts of this strategic agenda feed into each other, but they all make slightly different contributions. For example, one of the big strategic drivers for our MOOCs is the widening participation agenda, and we also see sharing our teaching and learning resources as being an important part of the University civic mission. Another really strong strategic driver for us was making sure that we don't suffer from what Melissa Highton has referred to as copyright debt. It's important that we get copyright right when we're creating educational content, otherwise it can be costly and time consuming to fix further down the line. Our Wikimedian has a slightly different agenda; to improve digital literacy and increase the coverage of marginalised groups and individuals on the encyclopaedia. All the different aspects of this wider open knowledge agenda play a different role, but we all contribute to expanding the pool of open knowledge.

The OER Service works closely with the Online Course Production Service, to ensure that the content created for our MOOCs is genuinely open and can be shared under open license. At the same time, the Online Course

Production Service is creating all these amazing open courses and open educational resources, which the OER Service is then able to share, so it's so it's very much symbiotic relationship.

Dai Griffiths. That's very interesting. It's amazing how varied the responses have been to questions that may sometimes seem strange in a particular context.

Lorna Campbell. Yes, and you can see the assumptions that are baked into the questions you're asking. If the assumptions don't match your strategic context, it's quite hard to make them fit together. SPARC Europe sends out an annual survey to academic libraries asking about their support for open education resources. In Edinburgh the OER Service is based in Learning, Teaching and Web Services, not the Library, so trying to answer the questionnaire is incredibly hard because all the questions come from the starting point that you are part of an academic library. I guess it's similar with the credentialing aspect. It works slightly differently. But everything we do is trying to pull all these services together to make sure that we're all working together so that the content we create can be shared under open license, and encouraging the reuse of that content to enhance sustainability.

Dai Griffiths. It's been very interesting talking to people in universities, in France and Spain which are very clearly funded by the state, and the public service aspect is very different from the UK. The idea that your job might be to create free courses that people could credentialise is much nearer the surface there than it is, as far as I can see, in a UK university or an American University.

Lorna Campbell. I think that's probably true, and even within that, Edinburgh is a bit of an outlier. It's an ancient university that has a strong civic mission about sharing its courses and its knowledge, the connection between the University and the city has always been important. One manifestation of that was the Edinburgh University Settlement. Other institutions also had these Settlements, which were reformist social movements around the beginning of the last century. The idea was that students should not be insulated from the poorer parts of the city, that they should live in the city, and share their knowledge and expertise, and do good works with the people of the city. The Edinburgh University Settlement closed in 2010, but that idea of this relationship between the University and the city is still very strong.

Dai Griffiths. And this informs in some way the OER work.

Lorna Campbell. It absolutely does. It's one of the pillars of our OER strategy. The idea of sharing knowledge is in with the stonework of the university. It's not just words, people have a real commitment to it. So open educational resources, open textbooks, Wikipedia assignments, open data, they're all just the latest manifestations of that mission.

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