

Cambridge 2012: Innovation and Impact - Report back

The [Cambridge 2012](#) OER conference was held in Cambridge this year (16- 18 April 2012), at the Queens' Sussex College and was run jointly by the [OCW](#) and [SCORE](#).

Below, I give a short break down of the themes of the 3 day conference and highlight topics I found interesting. The conference kicked off with pre-conference workshops on the Sunday, 15th. Some of the workshops that were run: Making Open Courseware Together (Edward Cherlin); Using Creative Commons Licenses for Education (Josceelyn Upendran) amongst a few others.

Workshops, presentations and panel discussions were happening concurrently- this made it difficult to be in more than one venue at a time. As with many of many conferences in this day and age, technology enabled offline discussions to happen in real-time through Twitter. With #cam12 as the backdrop, Day 1 kicked off with the conference chair, Andy Lane, welcoming all the delegates from around the world.

Day 1

Andy Lane, the conference chair welcomed all the delegates and introduced the speaker who was supposed to be the last keynote speaker for the conference, Professor Richardus Eko Indrajit from the ABFI Institute Perbanas in Jakarta. I would say, rather unfortunate that Sarah Porter, Head of Innovation from JSC was unable to attend, but Eko, as he said we could call him, set the tone for the conference. His presentation was based the data and status report on how they are developing a systematic approach to develop a functional platform for Open Education. His study was based on 350 Higher Learning Education Institutions in Indonesia- the statistics itself providing the context for their holistic approach to creating an 'ecosystem' where open education can address the challenges they face as a country. These ranged from infrastructure to stakeholders' literacy and external community supports. Here, he explained how they used a to-down approach to open access to education and the policies around open education practice. After he concluded his presentation, it was announced that the announcement of the next OER conference in Bali, which brought much excitement. Traditional Headdress pieces for men and women were distributed in the crowd of delegates – this eased the crowd.

Day 2

Keynote speaker Sir John Daniel (Commonwealth Learning) presented on Fostering Government Support for OER Internationally. The document is available [here](#). Policy implementation, institutionally and then government support- seemed like a contentious issue for people. And obviously so, funding and the attitude towards #open are of the major barriers to the OER movement gaining the momentum it can gain- thus also affecting the extent and the type of benefits it can deliver. Some of the presentations that also took place on that day that I attended: "Embed, don't bolt-on: promoting OER use in UK universities" (Wild, J.); Credentialing of OCW studies by Tertiary Educational Institutions (Murphy, E.) and The Impact of Developing OERs on Novice OER Developers (Hughes, J.).

Day 3

The last day of the conference was when Glenda Cox, Laura Czerniewicz, Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams and Gregory Doyle presented "From Project to Mainstream in a constrained environment towards openness at the University of Cape Town". The crowd was initially small, as to expect as many of the delegates had left the day before, and it was after the tea break. Laura provided the history and explained the various projects in operation at UCT. Statistics on the current directory contributions and contributors were also explained. The issues they covered provided the context that UCT operates in- giving insight to their philosophy to #open, and #oer. Technical issues were discussed (Greg Doyle)- touching on bandwidth, licensing technicalities and processes.

The attitude of academics who shared vs. those who didn't share and the reasons for this was explored by Glenda. Interesting observations came to the fore. For example, some academics would not always be willing to share their material AS-IS, but it would be good enough to share with their students. This posed interesting questions and directed to a direct benefit that encouraging academics to create open resources would increase the quality of their materials.

Other thought-provoking points were those that Cheryl H highlighted- the student (tutor) involvement in creating OER and their somewhat altruistic attitude in the promotion of OER. Majority of students involved in the project would see the advantage for the University and other students rather than only their own benefit. The audience engaged in discussion with the panelists further- and questions on Glenda's study as well as the funding opportunities were brought up.

Overall impression:

Questions lingered longer in my mind was, where were the actual students? Some (few) of the delegates questioned whether or not what they were doing was indeed benefiting the students. All student input, per se, came from surveys conducted.

Data is very important- it serves a way of encouraging people to share. It provides evidence – so being able to interpret the data, metadata and paradata. Analysis, quality and the skills required to interpret of the data was a topic explored by [Jackie Carter](#).

Reuse, re-purposing and re-sharing: This was something I wondered about and it was brought up. Repurposing OER available to fit the context that it is needed, like using resources created in UK, in South Africa is important and thus, the initial resource must be created to be sharable- from technical licensing issues but also format aspects. The second was the question, are resources that are re-purposed actually shared again? Do individuals re-share their creations? If not, why are they inclined not to do so? A related note to this would be, are people first looking for readily available content first and then contextualizing it or are they opting to create first?

Lastly, an important topic not fully addressed is the issue of academics being credited in some way for the OERs they create. Our Vice Chancellor, [Dr Max Price](#), touched on this in his welcome address at the Open Education Week held earlier this year (UCT) and expressed how important it was to develop a system where those who dedicate their time to developing these resources need to be cited in some form. Although there are few universities and initiatives that have this type of system in place- it requires a mind-set change as to what praises (accolades) are associated with this practise- especially considering the high quality of these resources, the effort academics put in and the huge benefits the learners gain from these resources.

The conference was a great opportunity to understand what the #oer movement is all about- from novice OER creators or to those involved much longer (who are tackling different types of issues like policy implementation or long term strategy development). Discussions on what the movement aims to achieve, the barriers it is faced with and the passionate people who aim to break these down led to more questions on unexplored areas and thus opportunities for answering these pertinent questions. I met


many people who are open to working on projects and papers to address issues and answer questions to the many we all still have after the conference.

Have a look at the filmed presentations [here](#).

-Yvette Adams-

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by admye001

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