

Embedding Openness in the Design Process of Web-based Learning Arrangements

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Open Education, Open Educational Practices, Open Educational Resources, Socio-technical Systems

Purpose of this paper

Open Education means providing access to information and education for everybody so that they can participate in society and be creators of their lives (UNESCO, 2012). With a closer look at the digital landscape these days many implementations of the open education idea appear to be open washing (Weller, 2014) as several studies show: Great numbers of participants in MOOCs can be attributed to the long tail effect and high drop out rates point to the fact that not everybody is made for self-organized online learning (Schulmeister, 2014). Insights into the profiles of MOOC participants show that most of them already have an academic education (Christensen et al., 2013; Emanuel, 2013). Increasing commercialization of platforms and usage of participants data for recruiting put some supposedly open initiatives in a bad light. Finally, the World Bank Report comes to the conclusion that the internet has not yet reached those who could benefit from its potential (World Bank, 2016, p. 147). Everything open but in the end not won anything for a fairer world?

Accordingly, there are many indications that Silicon Valley's "solutionism" (Morozov, 2013) alone will not improve education in the world. Hence, putting information online with low access barriers is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. This criticism also Open Educational Resources (OER) have to put up with as long as OER practices are not fully implementing Wiley's complete set of "5Rs" and take a halt at "just" creating and distributing

OER (Wiley, n.d.). There is a need for practices that move on from a technical perspective over to the social, organizational and cultural aspects of education in an online world and understand an online learning environment as a socio-technical system the way Herrmann (2003) does it referring to Luhmann (1990, 2008).

Within such a system, questions like the following arise: What roles exist in such a system? How important is the individual? How is the design of learning arrangements influenced by the individuals' dispositions, values and attitudes? And how can "staff" be trained to be open in the sense of Open Education? If openness does not only mean access, which can be easily produced with technical solutions, what else does it mean? How can openness be considered and embedded in the process of planning online learning arrangements? And how can the various actors that are playing roles in the design process of learning arrangements become aware of the potential of openness?

The study within this dissertation project dealing with these questions takes a look at various examples of experimental online learning arrangements and practices from recent years that can be called open. The analysis of interviews with initiators and educators in these cases is interwoven with a profound analysis of fundamental literature in the discourses Open Source, Open Education, Open Educational Resources and Open Educational Practices.

The aim of this analysis is to provide guidelines for embedding openness in socio-technical systems for online learning along with the process of their design and sensitize actors involved for the idea of Open Education.

Despite digital media and tools being omnipresent and the abundance of information on the web we have to face the fact that the idea of Open Education has not yet succeeded world wide. It seems thus legitimate to approach the problem from a different angle. In this contribution to the symposium an overview of the research intention and approach is given to define and initially embed openness in the design process of web-based learning arrangements.

Design/methodology/approach

Literature analysis, expert interviews, qualitative content analysis

Findings/expected Findings

From the analysis of literature and interviews diverse factors could be found that altogether add up to a complex model of openness. These factors point to a cognitive and experience-based approach to learn what openness means and embed it in the design process of web-based learning arrangements.

What is original/value of paper

The research approach introduced with this paper brings up an aspect in the current debate about openness in education that has not been shed enough light on yet: Open for whom? And how for everybody?

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