Dossier "Informalisation of Education"

ARTICLE

Beyond the Ivory Tower: A Model for Nurturing Informal Learning and Development Communities through Open Educational Practices

Tony Coughlan
t.coughlan@open.ac.uk
The Open University, United Kingdom

Leigh-Anne Perryman
leigh.a.perryman@open.ac.uk
Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University, United Kingdom

Abstract

Open Educational Resources (OER) and Open Educational Practices (OEP) are making an ever-growing impact on the field of adult learning, offering free high-quality education to increasing numbers of people. However, the top-down distribution of weighty university courses that typifies current provision is not necessarily suitable for contexts such as Continued Professional Development (CPD). This article proposes that a change of focus from a supplier-driven to a needs-led approach, grounded in theories of informal learning, could increase the positive impact of OER and OEP beyond the ivory towers of higher education.

To explore this approach, we focused on the requirements of a specific community outside higher education – trainers in the UK's voluntary sector – in order to design a more broadly applicable model for a sustainable online learning community focused around OER and OEP. The model was informed by a recent survey of voluntary sector trainers establishing their need for high-quality free resources and their desire to develop more productive relationships with their peers, and by evaluation of successful online communities within and outside the voluntary sector.

Our proposed model gives equal attention to learning resources and group sociality. In it, academics and practitioners work together to adapt and create learning materials and to share each other's knowledge and experiences through discussion forums and other collaborative activities. The model features an explicit up-skilling dimension based on Communities of Practice (CoP) theory and a system of reputation management to incentivise participation. The model is unique in building a pan-organisation community that is entirely open in terms of membership and resources. While the model offered in this article is focused on the voluntary sector, it could also be applied more widely, allowing practitioner communities the benefits of tailored resources and academic input, and collaborating universities the benefit of having their OER used and reused more widely for CPD through informal learning.

Keywords

open educational practices, informal learning, open educational resources, continuing professional development, communities of practice, reputation management

Más allá de la torre de marfil: un modelo para potenciar las comunidades de aprendizaje informal y desarrollo mediante prácticas educativas abiertas

Resumen

Los recursos educativos abiertos (REA) y las prácticas educativas abiertas (PEA) tienen un impacto cada vez mayor en el aprendizaje para adultos, ya que proporcionan educación gratuita de alta calidad a un creciente número de personas. Sin embargo, la distribución vertical que caracteriza a los cursos universitarios disponibles en la actual oferta educativa no se adecua necesariamente a contextos como el desarrollo profesional continuo (DPC). Este artículo sostiene que un nuevo planteamiento que permita pasar de un enfoque centrado en el proveedor a otro que gravite alrededor de la necesidad, basado en las teorías del aprendizaje informal, podría incrementar el impacto positivo de los REA y las PEA más allá de la torre de marfil en qué está hoy situada la educación superior.

Para explorar este planteamiento, nos hemos centrado en los requisitos de una comunidad específica que no pertenece al ámbito de la educación superior –formadores del sector voluntario del Reino Unido– para diseñar un modelo que pueda aplicarse de forma amplia a una comunidad de aprendizaje sostenible y en línea centrada en REA y PEA. El modelo se basa en una encuesta reciente realizada a formadores voluntarios, que establecía su necesidad de disponer de recursos gratuitos de alta calidad y su deseo de

entablar relaciones más productivas con sus colegas, así como en un informe sobre comunidades en línea pertenecientes o no al sector voluntario.

El modelo que proponemos presta la misma atención a los recursos de aprendizaje que a la sociabilidad del grupo. Para ello, los investigadores y los profesionales trabajan conjuntamente para adaptar y crear materiales de aprendizaje y poner en común conocimientos y experiencias a través de foros de discusión y otras actividades en colaboración. El modelo plantea una dimensión explícita de mejora de competencias basada en la teoría de las comunidades de práctica (CP) y un sistema de gestión de la reputación que incentiva la participación. Se trata de un modelo único para la creación de una comunidad pan-organizativa totalmente abierta en cuanto a recursos y posibilidad de afiliación. Si bien el modelo que se presenta en este artículo se centra básicamente en el sector voluntario, también podría aplicarse de forma más amplia a otros sectores, lo que permitiría que las comunidades de práctica se beneficiaran de recursos diseñados a medida y de contribuciones académicas, y que las universidades participantes vieran que sus REA se utilizan y reutilizan de forma más amplia para el DPC a través del aprendizaje informal.

Palabras clave

prácticas educativas abiertas, aprendizaje informal, recursos educativos abiertos, desarrollo profesional continuo, comunidades de práctica, gestión de la reputación

1. Introduction – background and rationale

Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching and learning materials that can be used, reused and often edited free of charge, ranging in size from full courses to individual lectures, images and videos. The OER movement is now seen as an important influence on education globally. For example, in the past decade, US-based Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has released virtually all its course content freely online and, in April 2012, announced a non-profit partnership with Harvard University – edX (www.edxonline.org) – offering free online courses from both universities to over a million people worldwide. In the UK, The Open University has made over 600 online courses freely available via its OpenLearn repository (http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/), and hundreds of thousands of video- and audio-based learning materials can be freely accessed through services such as YouTube EDU and iTunes U.

The benefits of OER for individual learners, educators and learning institutions are clear. For instance, they can help increase participation in education by making high-quality learning materials available without cost to the user (Geser, 2007, p. 21), irrespective of their geographical location, financial status and educational background. Additionally, OER offer educators the potential to broaden their teaching and learning strategies and subject scope, while the institutions and individuals creating and publishing OER can benefit from "increased status and visibility, and increased demand for other services and products" (Schmidt, 2007).

The OER movement was conceptualised over a decade ago, united in a belief in 'openness' – the notion that "knowledge should be disseminated and shared freely through the Internet for the benefit of society as a whole" (Yuan et al., 2007, p. 1), with as few technical, legal or price restrictions as possible. While the OER movement has worked to minimise these restrictions, the potential of OER is

still limited by the fact that institutions tend to release resources on a top-down, supplier-driven basis rather than providing them in response to the needs of end users. Guthrie et al. (2008, p. 20) confirm that "understanding user needs is paramount but often neglected" within the OER movement.

The lack of needs-led provision is beginning to be addressed through a shift of emphasis from OER release to open educational practices (OEP) (Cape Town Open Education Declaration, 2008; Guthrie et al., 2008). Ehlers (2011, p. 4) explains that OEP are "practices which support the (re)use and production of OER through institutional policies, promote innovative pedagogical models, and respect and empower learners as co-producers". However, the OER movement remains largely located within universities, which are often exclusive (Walsh, 2011), and this remains a barrier for people outside higher education. Indeed, research into both OER and OEP tends to focus on university undergraduates, leaving "major gaps in our understanding of learner use of OER" (Bacsich et al., 2011, pp. 8-9).

Seely Brown and Adler (2008) suggest that OEP outside higher education work best in a learning community setting. They differentiate between a 'supply-push' mode of learning whereby 'an inventory of knowledge' is built up in students' heads, and a 'demand-pull' mode of learning which "shifts the focus to enabling participation" (Seely Brown & Adler, 2008, p. 30). They argue that demand-pull should replace supply-push in order to meet the demands of fast-changing job roles, allowing people to learn throughout their lives, even where the subjects in which they are interested are very niche.

Various writers (e.g., Weller, 2011) have identified the potential for OER and OEP to be used in the context of Continued Professional Development (CPD), and JISC (2012) identify the scope for OEP to extend beyond higher education into "communities of practice (such as subject or professional discipline, sectoral, regional)", including "using OERs for informal learning or work-based learning" adding that "workplace and employer involvement has been identified as important and deserves more consideration". However, as yet little has been written about how this might work.

This article reports the findings of a study exploring the potential for OER and OEP to be used on a demand-pull basis in the context of CPD, whereby academics involved in producing OER collaborate with an existing community outside higher education, working together to source, create and adapt CPD resources. The article outlines a proposed model for the way this collaboration might be realised in practice.

2. The CPD context – trainers in the UK's voluntary sector

For the purposes of this study, we focused on an existing community that we anticipated might greatly benefit from OER and OEP – trainers in the UK's voluntary sector[1]. Venter and Sung (2009, p. 47), reporting on workforce development in the sector, point out that "there are still significant

---

1. The voluntary sector is variously labelled within the United Kingdom and elsewhere, alternative names including 'the voluntary and community sector', 'the third sector', 'the non-profit sector' and the 'not-for-profit sector'. Individual organisations may also be referred to as 'charities' or 'NGOs'.

barriers to training", including lack of time, cost, and the non-availability of appropriate training. They note that "resources for volunteer training are particularly scarce" (p. 45).

As we wished to explore demand-pull OEP, it was important first to establish the needs of the target community. We therefore conducted an online survey of 101 voluntary sector trainers and training managers[2] in order to identify their existing practices regarding the use of learning resources and their awareness of and attitudes towards OER. The survey results established the sector's need for relevant, high-quality and reliable learning resources, together with a commonly voiced desire to be able to collaborate more with their peers in the interests of professional development.

The survey results indicated that the trainers were generally unfamiliar with OER. Under half of the respondents indicated that they were aware of OpenLearn and YouTube EDU, only 26% were aware of iTunes U and just 16% were aware of MIT's OpenCourseWare. Only 4% stated that they had used OER in their training and even fewer respondents indicated that they had adapted OER to suit their individual training contexts. Importantly, the survey responses clearly indicated that voluntary sector trainers would need to gain additional skills in order to adapt and develop OER to suit their particular teaching contexts. For example, almost all the trainers indicated that they find it easy to create and edit Word and PowerPoint documents, but few said they were able to edit images, audio recordings and video/DVD resources, which are common components of OER. The survey responses offered evidence that the provision of OER-related training would encourage trainers to use OER, with 85% of the respondents indicating that they would be more likely to use OER if they received such training. One respondent added that OER would offer a "great benefit BUT…only with appropriate levels of support, both technical and content-based".

Asked about possible collaborations with higher education, the trainers suggested that while academics could perform a useful role in helping them to develop an online Community of Practice (CoP), their input should not be on a top-down basis and should instead be responsive to the needs of the community, helping trainers to better support their own learners. Indeed, 82% of the respondents indicated that gaining improved relationships with the academic community and with their peers would increase the likelihood of their using OER. Several trainers emphasised the value of being able to quickly adapt to new challenges in response to their learners' needs, one commenting: "I deliver compliance training and it is difficult as the law changes often. I would find it very useful to be in a community where we could quickly discuss changes in the law and their implications."

Only 3% of the respondents indicated that the voluntary sector has sufficient good-quality free toolkits available. Additionally, many of the voluntary sector trainers indicated that they find it difficult to assess the quality, level and currency of existing training resources: 57% suggested that it is difficult to evaluate the credibility of a learning resource, 54% indicated that they find it difficult to judge whether content is up-to-date, 47% suggested that they find it difficult to evaluate the educational merit of a resource, 45% indicated that they find it difficult to judge a resource's educational level, and 63% suggested that it is difficult to judge whether content corresponds with National Occupational

---

2. The survey was conducted using Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and featured a combination of closed Likert-scale questions and open questions. The sample (n=410) comprised trainers and training managers appearing in the mail lists of three umbrella training organisations.

Standards. Finally, asked how difficult it is to assess their peers' expertise, 75% of the trainers indicated that they found it difficult to judge a trainer's expertise in a particular subject and their teaching ability.

3. The theoretical context

Having established the voluntary sector trainers' needs, we drew on theories of informal learning[3] in order to conceptualise a possible model for an online community of open practice in which OER and OEP are used on a demand-pull basis to support the CPD of both the trainers and the volunteers and employees they are responsible for training.

3.1. Informal online learning and CPD

Informal learning is often promoted as particularly appropriate for workforce development. Attwell (2007, p. 4) makes a distinction between formal and informal learning when reporting his research into the use of e-learning in small and medium enterprises (SME). He identifies the popularity of informal over formal learning for CPD, explaining that his research team "found little take up of formal courses" but found "widespread use of the Internet for informal learning, through searching, joining on-line groups and using email and bulletin boards", with Google emerging as "the most popular application for learning". Cross (2007, p. 192) echoes Attwell's observation that much informal learning takes place online, asserting that "the Internet was made for informal learning…It's user-driven. You can pick what you want and take a little or a lot".

3.2. Informal learning and CoP

Lave and Wenger's (1996) CoP theory offered a useful starting point for designing our model. Very broadly, a CoP is a network of individuals who have a common interest. Learning within a CoP tends not to be formal, instead taking place through a process whereby more experienced participants pass their knowledge and skills on to their peers, thereby enhancing the shared expertise of the participants. Siemens (2006, p. 40) explains that "community-based learning" typically draws on "the wisdom of the crowds", creating a "multi-faceted view of a space or discipline" through "social dialogue" and "diversity of perspective". Seely-Brown and Adler (2008, p. 30) suggest that "rich (sometimes virtual) learning communities built around a practice" are the best way to provide demand-pull modes of learning, adding that "often the learning that transpires is informal rather than formally conducted in a structured setting [and]… may be supported by both a physical and a virtual presence and by collaboration between newcomers and professional practitioners/scholars" (Seely Brown & Adler, 2008, p. 30).

---

3. The terms 'informal' and 'non-formal' learning are variously used both within and outside the field of educational research, and exploring the distinction between them is beyond the scope of this study. (See Burbules (2006) for an exploration of this issue). In common with Attwell (2007), we use the term 'informal learning' to accommodate all learning outside formal contexts.

4. Evaluating online communities of open practice

Downes (2007b, p. 26) proposes that "when [learning] networks are properly designed, they reliably facilitate learning". So, having established the voluntary sector trainers' needs, we evaluated two thriving online communities, aiming to identify factors which might be contributing to their success and which might usefully feature in our own model.

Bouman et al. (2008) argue that "certain facilities of social software are able to trigger mechanisms in people that make them engage in offline and online social activities" or "sociality" (p. 5). They identify four different realms of sociality that social software should address in order to incentivise participation:

- Building identity, which can help facilitate trust and connectivity between participants who identify with each other's goals and values.
- Enabling practice (both social and working practice).
- Self-actualisation, whereby people "develop themselves by using their social environment to learn to discover new perspectives" (p. 11).
- Mimicking reality, in that "people… are more inclined to use software systems that resemble their daily routines, language and practices" (p. 10).

Bouman et al.'s 'triggers for sociality' theory was used as the basis for evaluating the design of two online communities that are particularly notable in terms of their high levels of participation:

- MERLOT: Located within the higher education sector, the non-profit organisation MERLOT (www.merlot.org) comprises a collection of over 35,000 OER, some of which are peer-reviewed by trained MERLOT peer reviewers, and an open online community of educators and students who evaluate these learning materials and discuss related pedagogy around their use. MERLOT receives an average of 75,320 visits per month and, by March 2012, had 100,380 registered members globally.
- rightsnet: Located within the UK voluntary sector, the rightsnet community of welfare rights advisers (www.rightsnet.org.uk) has an average of 40,000 visits per month and, by March 2012, 7,500 individuals and 1,500 organisations were registered members. rightsnet members are almost all welfare rights advisors and, as such, rightsnet operates as a 'second-tier' community which is able to indirectly benefit hundreds of thousands of clients. Shawn Mach, Head of Social Welfare Law Services at the social welfare rights and technology charity Lasa (www.lasa.org.uk), which operates rightsnet, comments that:

As a second-tier organisation rightsnet sees a huge multiplier effect in terms of the impact our advisors have on their clients. I think this is the most effective and efficient way to work as you build a community that is empowered to best help others. We just facilitate the army of advice workers to help themselves and to do what they're best at. (Mach, 2012)

The rightsnet community resources include up-to-date news on the latest statutory instruments, searchable, cross-referenced summaries of relevant case law, 12 moderated discussion forums offering peer-to-peer support focused on handling client cases, benefit rates information and calculators, and the latest advice sector job vacancies.

Our evaluation of rightsnet and MERLOT has informed the design of our own model, discussed below.

5. The model – a collaborative self-educating community of open practice and informal learning

Our model for a collaborative self-educating community of open practice based on informal learning and intended to meet the needs of the voluntary sector trainers (whilst also being transferrable to other sectors and communities) is illustrated in Figure 1.
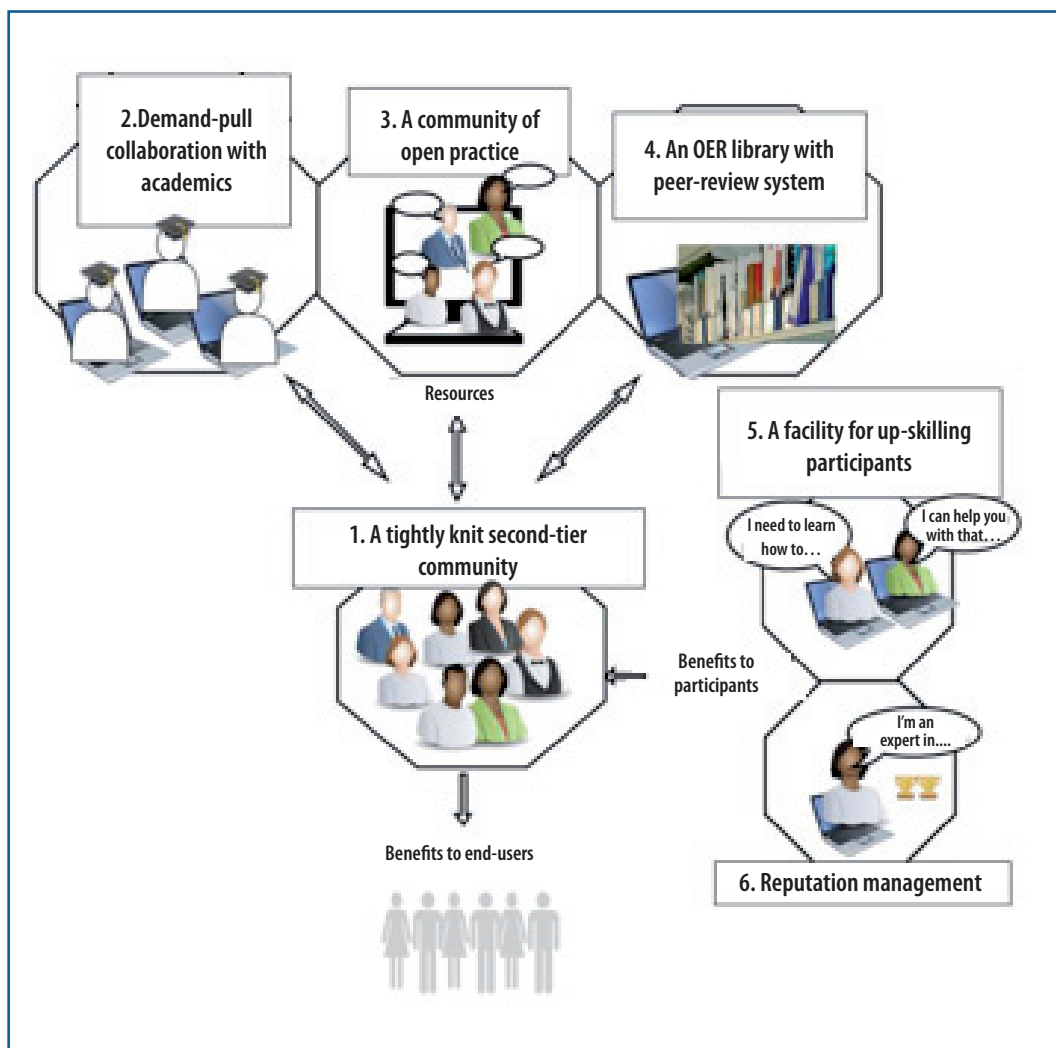

Figure 1: Model for a collaborative self-educating community of open practice and informal learning

Each element of the model is discussed in Table 1 below, which shows the relationship between the model elements, the voluntary sector trainers' stated needs and the theory informing our model, together with existing examples of communities demonstrating individual elements of the model.

During the process of conceptualising our proposed model, we explored numerous online communities both to identify successful community elements and, later in the development process, to assess whether such a model already existed. Elements of our model do appear in some online

Needs of the voluntary sector trainers/training managers		Theory		Solution (elements 1 to 5 in Figure 1)	Examples elsewhere
To share experiences and resources with peers who have similar priorities.	+	Watts (2010, p. 192): "Online learning is not inherently social and works best with groups that already know each other."	=	**1: A pre-existing, tightly-focused second-tier community connected with a particular job role.** Our model works on a 'second-tier' basis, supporting frontline workers (e.g., the voluntary sector trainers) in doing their job, but not engaging directly with the beneficiaries of those workers (e.g., voluntary sector employees and volunteers). *Incentive for participation:* • Tightly-focused online communities based on naturally occurring groups are likely to "mimic reality" (Bouman et al., 2008) and, as a consequence, community members are likely to enjoy shared values, practices and modes of communication that are conducive to sustained online participation and support.	rightsnet, tightly focused around a specific job role, has a particularly strong group identity, evidenced through the use of shared language, including acronyms[4], through group self-awareness and through direct references made to the group as an entity. Shared resources, ideas and experiences are in abundance in the rightsnet forum postings. The forum also features quite a lot of humour, largely based on in-group knowledge and experiences.[5]
Collaboration with academics who are responsive to their needs and who will help develop an online CoP.	+	Jay Cross (2007, p. 84), e-learning pioneer: Criticises top-down 'management' of online learning communities, asserting that "you can't mandate community. The best you can do is to establish the context, provide a purpose and nurture the group". Conceptualising community members as 'free-range learners' Cross (2007, p.223) suggests that academics' role is "to protect their environment, provide nutrients for growth, and let nature take its course".	=	**2: Demand-pull collaboration with academics.** • Practitioners work with academics to source, create and adapt OER, giving the academics clear direction about their resource needs. • The academics may initially be involved in moderating discussion forums, but it is intended that moderation would eventually be performed by community members. *Incentive for participation:* • Participants have autonomy and a needs-led relationship with academics.	rightsnet involves collaboration between legal specialists and frontline welfare rights advisers and often operates on a demand-pull basis.

---

4. http://www.rightsnet.org.uk/forums/viewthread/2818/

5. E.g., http://www.rightsnet.org.uk/forums/viewthread/1661/ and http://www.rightsnet.org.uk/forums/viewthread/1993/

Needs of the voluntary sector trainers/training managers		Theory		Solution (elements 1 to 5 in Figure 1)	Examples elsewhere
Increased collaboration and interaction with peers.	+	Bouman et al. (2008, p.7): Successful online communities combine people or group-based sociality and object-based sociality. In people- or group-based sociality, a sense of belonging arises from connectivity in a network or a community (e.g., Facebook). In object-based sociality (e.g., Wikipedia) "a shared experience or meaning arises from objects valued as belonging to or characteristic for a certain group".	=	**3: An online community of open practice featuring discussion forums and other collaborative activities.** Our model seeks to equally balance group-based and object-based sociality, allowing opportunities for informal learning through a combination of peer-to-peer discussion, an OER library and various collaborative activities. *Incentive for participation:* • Sense of belonging and connectivity. • Enabling practice through collaborative problem-solving.	rightsnet balances group and object-based sociality, combining thriving discussion forums with a narrow but plentiful selection of resources (though many of these resources are not open).
Free, high-quality training resources and reliable information about resources' quality, educational level, currency and any mapping against National Occupational Standards.	+	Bouman et al. (2008): Helping trainers to assess the quality of resources they intend to use would meet Bouman et al.'s 'enabling practice' trigger for sociality.	=	**4: An OER library featuring a peer-review system of content evaluation.** Resources are rated by users against pre-defined criteria, with the facility to add comments about how a resource might be used in particular contexts or ways in which a resource might be improved. *Incentive for participation:* • Reviewing materials, adding comments and developing learning exercises would offer opportunities for individual identity-building and self-actualisation (two of Bouman et al.'s 'triggers for sociality').	MERLOT's trained peer reviewers evaluate popular learning materials against criteria covering content quality, effectiveness as a teaching tool and ease of use for students and educators, resulting in an overall 1 to 5 star rating. Learning material users can also comment on the materials and provide learning exercises showing how the materials might be used in particular contexts or for specific educational levels.
Additional skills in order to be able to adapt and develop OER to suit their teaching contexts.	+	Lave & Wenger (1996): CoP theory whereby groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Burbules (2006): Theory of 'self-educating communities' who have "an overt commitment to sharing information, initiating newcomers, and extending their collective knowledge".	=	**5: Facility for up-skilling participants via a CoP.** Discussion forums allow trainers to share their skills and resources, and to work collaboratively in repurposing existing OER to meet their individual settings and in creating new resources from scratch. Initially, OER-specialist academics may take a leading role in up-skilling the trainers though it is anticipated that the community would soon become wholly self-educating through a process of cascading training and skills development. *Incentive for participation:* • Opportunities for training and skills development.	rightsnet is a self-educating community where members work together to share experiences and solve complex problems; MERLOT's peer reviewers are trained via a regular online 'Grape Camp', combining instructor-led presentation with individual and collaborative reviewing tasks.

Needs of the voluntary sector trainers/training managers		Theory		Solution (elements 1 to 5 in Figure 1)	Examples elsewhere
To be able to assess their peers' credibility and skills.	+	Burbules (2006, p. 274): Some members of online communities "distinguish themselves through frequency of contributions, quality and originality of contributions, and consensually recognized expertise or wisdom". Reputation management systems offer community members the chance to explicitly demonstrate this within and beyond that community. Bacon (2012): Argues for a 'social capital'-based model of reputation management, explaining that "community is fundamentally a social economy, and its participants build up social capital via their contributions" (p. 14) on a meritocracy basis, whereby "members are given responsibilities and recognition based on achievements, merit, and talent" (p. 37).	=	**6: System of reputation management.** Badges appear on members' profiles indicating their role(s) in the community and quantifying the tasks they perform for that community, such as a peer reviewer, moderator or forum participant. *Incentivises participation through:* • Allowing for participant identity-building. • Offering value for career development outside the community. • Allowing users to assess the credibility and expertise of people making comments on the learning materials, thereby 'enabling practice' (Bouman et al., 2008).	MERLOT features a meritocratic reputation management system which automatically displays a publicly visible profile for each member plus a summary of the ways in which members have contributed to the MERLOT community.

Table 1: The elements of a collaborative self-educating community of open practice and informal learning

communities such as MERLOT and rightsnet, as shown above. However, our model is unique in being pan-organisational, drawing together employees and volunteers from many different organisations, in addition to self-employed people, and facilitating learning on a 'connectivist' basis whereby "knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and… learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse those networks" (Downes, 2007a). Our model is also unique in that it has no commercial element, being based on OEP and the use of OER rather than offering content that can only be accessed via a paid-for subscription.

5.1 Maintenance and sustainability of the community

When developing our model, we also explored the ongoing maintenance and sustainability of the proposed community. While the technology involved should cost little (hosting a community website is relatively cheap and can even be free), labour can be much more expensive. Our model therefore includes provision for consistent and reliable discussion forum moderation and technical support sourced from community members. The rightsnet case study shows that moderators can emerge from a strong community of 'veteran' participants. However, people do generally need to be rewarded

for their efforts. With rightsnet, the link between community participation and professional benefit is so strong that members appear to participate willingly in co-moderating the community. However, the same may not be true in communities where the link between participation and practice is less direct. In such cases, it is envisaged that the proposed reputation management system (Element 6 in the model) would help to incentivise participation in the running of a community, allowing individuals to develop and demonstrate in-community credibility while also developing a reputation and credibility outside that community. Through reputation management, it would be possible to incentivise in-community moderation (and other roles necessary to the ongoing development of a community, such as technical support), together with resource provision and evaluation, by recognising and publicly acknowledging such roles.

6. Conclusion

Our model takes the most effective components of the two case study communities and combines them to best meet the needs of the voluntary sector trainers and to make good use of the skills and resources offered by collaborating academics. While our model is focused on the voluntary sector, it could easily be applied elsewhere, helping to bridge a perceived disconnection between informal learning and the formal learning that takes place in educational institutions (see Attwell, 2007). Further research might therefore investigate ways in which this model could be applied in other sectors, both in the UK and globally, in order to extend the benefits of OER and OEP to a wider audience.

Our model is still a work in progress and, as yet, has not been piloted. Furthermore, we are deliberately not discussing a software platform for the model as this is beyond the scope of the article and, as online tools are ever-changing, it is more important to think about functionality rather than software. As it stands, though, the model should have the potential to offer a structured yet flexible approach to extending the benefits of OER and OEP beyond the ivory towers of higher education, through a self-educating community of open practice based on informal learning and a 'nurturing' approach by collaborating academics.

References

ATTWELL, G. (2007). "Personal Learning Environments - the future of eLearning?". *eLearning Papers*. Vol. 2, No 1. [Accessed: 20 May 2012].
    <http://www.elearningeuropa.info/files/media/media11561.pdf>
BACON, J. (2012). *The Art of Community: Building the New Age of Participation*. Sebastapol, California: O'Reilly Media.
BACSICH, P.; PHILLIPS, B.; BRISTOW, S. F. (2011). *Learner Use of Online Educational Resources for Learning (LUOERL) - Final report*. [Accessed: 5 June 2012].
    <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearning/oer/LUOERLfinalreport.docx>

BOUMAN, W.; HOOGENBOOM, T.; JANSEN, R.; SCHOONDORP, M.; DE BRUIN, B.; HUIZING, A. (2008). "The Realm of Sociality: Notes on the Design of Social Software". *PrimaVera Working Paper Series*. Amsterdam: Universiteit Van Amsterdam. [Accessed: 3 June 2012]
<http://primavera.feb.uva.nl/PDFdocs/2008-01.pdf>

BURBULES, N. C. (2006). "Self-Educating Communities: Collaboration and Learning through the Internet". In: Z. Bekerman, N. C. Burbules & D. Silberman-Keller. *Learning in Places: The Informal Education Reader*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. Pages 273-284.

CAPE TOWN OPEN EDUCATION DECLARATION (2008). *Cape Town Open Education Declaration*. [Accessed: 20 July 2011].
<www.capetowndeclaration.org/read-the-declaration>

CROSS, J. (2007). *Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways That Inspire Innovation and Performance*. San Francisco, California: Pfeiffer/Wiley.

DOWNES, S. (2007a). *Half an Hour: What Connectivism Is*. [Accessed: 2 October 2012].
<http://halfanhour.blogspot.co.uk/2007/02/what-connectivism-is.html>

DOWNES, S. (2007b). "Learning Networks in Practice". *Emerging technologies for learning*. Volume 2, pages 19-27. [Accessed: 25 May 2012].
<nparc.cisti-icist.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/npsi/ctrl?action=rtdoc&an=8913424&lang=en>

EHLERS, U.-D. (2011). "Extending the Territory: From Open Educational Resources to Open Educational Practices". *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*. Vol. 15, No 2, pages 1-10. [Accessed: 14 June 2012].
<http://journals.akoaotearoa.ac.nz/index.php/JOFDL/article/viewFile/2064/2046>

GESER, G. (2007). *Open Educational Practices and Resources - OLCOS Roadmap 2012*. [Accessed: 3 June 2012].
<http://www.olcos.org/cms/upload/docs/olcos_roadmap.pdf>

GUTHRIE, K.; GRIFFITHS, R.; MARON, N. L. (2008). *Sustainability and Revenue Models for Online Academic Resources: An Ithaka Report*. [Accessed: 20 May 2012].
<http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/wp/files/2008/06/sca_ithaka_sustainability_report-final.pdf>

JISC (2012). *Open Practice Across Sectors: A briefing paper*. [Accessed: 10 June 2012].
<https://oersynth.pbworks.com/w/page/49655750/OpenPracticeAcrossSectors>

LANE, A. (2008). "Am I good enough? The mediated use of open educational resources to empower learners in excluded communities". Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, 13-17 July 2008. London, United Kingdom. [Accessed: 26 June 2012].
<http://oro.open.ac.uk/17829/1/Am_I_good_enough.pdf>

LAVE, J.; WENGER, E. (1996). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

MACH, S. (2012). Interview with Leigh-Anne Perryman, 23 March 2012.

SCHMIDT, P. (2007). *UNESCO OER Toolkit Draft*. [Accessed: 16 June 2012].
<http://wikieducator.org/UNESCO_OER_Toolkit_Draft#Benefits_of_Open_Educational_Resources>

SEELY BROWN, J.; ADLER, R. P. (2008). "Minds on Fire: Open Education, the Long Tail, and Learning 2.0.". *EDUCAUSE Review*. Vol. 43, No 1, pages 16-32. [Accessed: 11 June 2012].
<http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0811.pdf>

SIEMENS, G. (2006). *Knowing Knowledge*, Lulu.com.

VENTER, K.; SUNG, J. (2009). *Do Skills Matter? A Literature Review on Skills and Workforce Development in the Third Sector*. London, Skills Third Sector.

WALSH, T. (2011). *Unlocking the Gates: How and why leading universities are opening up access to their courses*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

WATTS, N. (2010). "Reflecting On Models For Online Learning In Theory & Practice". *The All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Vol. 2, No 1. pages 19.1-19.12. [Accessed: 13 June 2012].
<http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/viewArticle/2019>

WELLER, M. (2011). *The Digital Scholar: How Technology Is Transforming Scholarly Practice*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849666275>

YUAN, L.; MACNEILL, S.; KRAAN, Wilbert (2007). *Open Educational Resources - Opportunities and Challenges for Higher Education*. [Accessed: 2 June 2012].
<http://wiki.cetis.ac.uk/images/0/0b/OER_Briefing_Paper.pdf>

About the Authors

Tony Coughlan
t.coughlan@open.ac.uk
The Open University, United Kingdom

Tony Coughlan is a qualified Social Worker with a Post-Qualifying Award in Social Work and a master's degree in Education (Lifelong Learning). He works as a regional academic at The Open University managing courses in childhood and youth, and has a history of joint-working with childhood and youth employers. Beyond paid work, Tony is also a director and trustee of a small children's charity.

Tony is a Fellow of the Support Centre for Open Resources in Education (www.OpenEd.ac.uk). His research interests include the use of Open Educational Resources and Open Educational Practices within the children's workforce.

Leigh-Anne Perryman
leigh.a.perryman@open.ac.uk
Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University, United Kingdom

Leigh-Anne Perryman holds a bachelor's degree in Humanities, a master's degree in Researching Inclusive Education and a doctorate in Inclusive Arts Education, awarded by The Open University, United Kingdom. Her doctoral thesis explored adults' cognitive and affective responses to contemporary art and the implications for arts pedagogy. She is a Fellow of the United Kingdom's Higher Education Academy and Institute for Learning. Leigh-Anne has been a lecturer for The Open University for 12 years, where she has also been involved in authoring module materials and designing online courses. Her current research interests include social and educational inclusion and the use of Open Educational Resources and Open Educational Practices within the voluntary and community sector. She has recently completed a United Kingdom Government-funded research project exploring the use of e-learning and peer-support communities in the voluntary sector.

Institute of Educational Technology
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
United Kingdom
www.open.ac.uk