IPA Position Paper

Publishers and Open Educational Resources can work together

Our mission as educational publishers is to provide continuously effective learning resources, tools and services for teachers and students, using the best media available. Dynamic, progressive educational publishing delivers learning resources developed with the quality, coherence and scope that individual students need and their teachers expect. For thirty years we have been exploring the effective use of technology in education. We continue to adapt rapidly as new technologies and devices overlap into education from consumer and professional markets.

Publishers and Open Educational Resources both have value

Alongside our professionally published products, there are now many freely available Open Educational Resources (OERs)[1] offered for use in the classroom.

OERs are a perennial of education. Teachers have always developed their own material to complement and enrich the commercially-published, curriculum-focused, structured learning material that makes up the backbone of resources used by most students and their teachers. With the availability of the Internet and digital production tools, the means exists for easy distribution of these free, crowd-sourced learning objects that are aggregated in repositories such as [TES]. As publishers we recognise the value of free content that is developed using private funding or created by individuals and then subsequently openly licensed.

In recent times OERs have also proliferated due to support from not-for-profit organizations and government-supported public funding. These initiatives are motivated by important policy objectives such as equal access to education, affordable education, even for the poorest, the use of technology to improve the educational experience, and the means to achieve these objectives under conditions of severe financial constraint. Some technology companies also promote the concept of standardizing curricula internationally and making available appropriate free content that will encourage more effective use of digital technologies in schools.

As commercial publishers, how do we align with these policy objectives?

We recognise the beneficial role that OERs can play in our mixed media environment and in some specific educational environments. We are sceptical however about the capacity of OERs to provide high quality content in core curriculum subjects in the longer term. An over-reliance on OERs will endanger the quality of school level education until a number of challenges related to extensive use of OERs are addressed, especially sustainability, quality, and efficacy. There are also issues associated with public funding of OER development.

OERs bring challenges for Sustainability, Quality, and Efficacy

<u>Sustainability</u>: OERs contribute useful content to the totality of available learning resources, but often they lack important features commonly associated with commercially-published resources that are needed in order fully to support students and teachers. Lacking the market incentive for renewal, OERs tend to become out of date quite quickly. Few OER programmes have built-in sustainability strategies or the on-going capacity to keep a wide range of material up to date.

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[1] The term Open Educational Resources (OERs) was identified and defined at UNESCO in 2002 as "teaching, learning or research materials that are in the public domain or released with an intellectual property licence that allows for free use, adaptation and distribution".

Quality: The development of quality instructional materials requires great amounts of knowledge, experience, expertise, investment, and persistence to ensure that they align with current academic standards and are effective in improving educational outcomes. Publisher-developed materials are carefully researched, designed, and reviewed through an established quality assurance process. There are however currently few recognisable quality assurance procedures associated with OERs.

Efficacy: As publishers we routinely make available studies and analytics of the positive impact that our products make in the classroom. There are currently no reliable analyses of the extent to which extensive use of OERs improves learning outcomes for students, and few if any OERs have the assessment and data features that are often built into our published products.

Government funding of OER development can restrict choice

Effective course materials need to be demand driven, fuelled by national standards, adapted to specific curricula and aligned with assessment frameworks. They should be refined by selection and competition in an open market. "In-house" government-funded projects historically have a poor track record for impact or sustainability so we have concerns about the use of public funds for OERs as well. Ironically, government-funded OER programmes can restrict choice for teachers and learners, because they undermine the ability of private sector providers to compete and thus to have the confidence to invest, so that these providers progressively withdraw from the market.

OERs can however have a positive role to play if the open market is unable to deliver a full set of appropriate learning resources. OERs then tend to arise naturally to complement and to fill the gaps in commercial provision. OERs have also been used effectively in combination with published materials by integrating access from the same platform. Public-private experiments are under way in several countries, such as in Holland with *Wikiwijs*. Publishers are happy to bring their skills, experience and expertise to OER projects that are sustainably funded and realistically remunerated.

A balanced solution to resource provision is needed

With balanced solutions in mind, we suggest that the following questions, which constantly concern publishers of professionally-produced learning resources, need also to be applied to OER initiatives:

- What have we learned from the latest research, pilot schemes and educational initiatives around the world?
- Do we fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of the application of technology in education?
- How do we attain and sustain good quality in learning content?
- Can OERs attain and sustain the same high quality levels expected of professionally published resources?
- What role do we expect OERs to play alongside professionally-published resources?
- What quality levels are required in order to fulfill this role?
- How can a healthy plurality of provision be sustained?

The IPA Educational Publishers Forum stands ready to engage in a dialogue around all these issues, indeed any issue related to the effective use of learning resources. We care deeply about serving teachers and their students by enabling successful learning experiences and improving educational outcomes.