

OER – AN INTERNATIONAL TREND WITH SLOW DEVELOPMENT IN SWEDEN

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Open Educational Resources, OER, are net-based resources, free to use and in many cases also free to remix and tweak. The global OER movement is very important. Development in Sweden however has been rather slow both with regard to open access publishing and sharing learning resources.

Within Swedish higher education there have been several notable initiatives by individual enthusiasts or pressure groups. University libraries are well aware of OER as a phenomenon and as a development based on principles closely related to Open Access and Open Source.

Internationally the OER movement is growing within all sectors of education, from K-12 to higher education. Some of the factors behind this development are the fact that education programs are increasingly globalised and that informal learning is valued and evaluated together with formal learning. Also in higher education general skills are growing in importance; in particular so-called 21st century skills such as information literacy, communication skills, digital literacy etc.

Important OER projects have been undertaken by large international organisations such as UNESCO and OECD. In July 2011 the organisation Commonwealth of Learning (COL) & Unesco published the Open Access publication "A Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources (OER)"¹. Unesco is in the process of revising their guidelines and arranged in the autumn of 2011 an online workshop to discuss the proposal of new guidelines, "Guidelines for OER in Higher Education".

The nations who so far have been more successful in integrating OER in education (t ex US, Australia, The Netherlands and the UK) have governmental authorities and other bodies that finance projects,

elaborate clear guidelines och promote OER in the country's academic community as a national priority.

A clear tendency today is that learning is more and more taking place in networks and digital social environments. In schools and universities OER is also becoming a formal resource. By using OER the traditional course content can be enriched with different perspectives and clarifications. OER offer more opportunities to collaborate between academic disciplines on a national and international level and teachers can gain both time and quality. Classroom time can be used for in-depth discussion and tutoring of pupils and students.

The use of open educational resources is not just a question of content and material. The use of OER is strongly related to new ways of viewing education and learning in general; and specifically to connectivism, a theory developed by Stephen Downes and George Siemens amongst others. The teacher's role as knowledge mediator is no longer valid since information and content are available everywhere by Internet.

Learning is taking place in networks where students collaborate on assignments and exchange experience. The teacher's role will rather be to be a mentor/tutor/inspirator/coordinator and the teacher's production of course material will diminish accordingly.

Open educational resources can also be both an incentive and a support to an increasing consciousness of the importance of evaluating sources. It is becoming increasingly important for both teachers and students to able to acquire a critical attitude towards Internet resources such as OER, a current example is the video Kony 2012². OER can also be used as a resource in the process of acquiring a critical attitude to

¹ Available online
<http://www.col.org/resources/publications/Pages/detail.aspx?PID=357>

² Available online
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>

information sources, for both teachers and students in secondary and tertiary education.

An important component in this development is that OERs should be tagged with metadata. Many teachers prefer to be able to search OERs according to criteria such as previous knowledge required, level, learning outcomes, main target group etc. Many enthusiastic teachers lose interest when they realize how difficult it is to make targeted searches for material.

Another important component is the need to spread knowledge about the use of Creative Commons as a complement to traditional copyright law.

To mark up the learning resources according to metadata standards and to supply a Creative Commons licence clearly stating how the material can be used are both important when ensuring that the resources can be used in a sustainable way. But they are also means of retrieving relevant material and material that can be remixed and tweaked in order to either increase the quality, to adapt it to the needs of a specific target group or to update it according to new scientific findings.

The digital development in society influences all sectors and professional roles. Factors like accessibility, mobility, interactivity and individual adaptation facilitate communication, collaboration and creativity. Students must learn to use the full potential of the net as an integral part of their education in order to acquire relevant skills for their professional lives.

Unfortunately a conservative attitude towards ICT resides still in further education and the gap between an increasingly digital economy and a basically analogue educational sector is widening.

The labour market of the future will require quality and innovation, independence and entrepreneurship, and the challenge for higher education is to create an environment that stimulates such characteristics.

Therefore it is extremely important that the Swedish universities encourage innovation and new thinking in teaching and learning.

A further problem for Sweden is the concept that teachers own the right to their material rather than the university (known as the *teacher exception* or in Swedish *lärarundantag*), and clarity in this issue demands attention from university leaders and authorities.

OER is not a separate question, OER must be seen as a integrated in a much more extensive process of change in higher education.

Individual universities can develop strategies for OER but it is necessary to have national coordination to minimise unnecessary duplication and the creation of parallel processes. Just as with Open Access it is necessary to have directives and strategic initiatives in order to change attitudes. In Sweden OER is still a grassroots movement, and without the full commitment of university managements and government authorities the use of OER will be fragmented and ad hoc.

A workgroup in the network ITHU (IT in Higher Education) has carried out projects to spread knowledge about OER in higher education. In order to move further on it is now necessary that main bodies such as the National Library of Sweden, the KK-foundation, HSV, SULF and SUHF now take initiatives and provide funding. The initiatives should not be limited to the knowledge about OER, it is crucial to also discuss questions such as the right to use learning resources versus the “teacher exception” and find a solution together with the teacher unions. A national Swedish OER network, including above mentioned organisations and the universities, could pursue these issues on a wide front!



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