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Contextualised Open Educational Practices: Towards Student Agency and Self-Directed Learning, edited by Jako Olivier, Charlene du Toit-Brits, Byron J. Bunt, and Amit Dhakulkar (AOSIS Books, 2022)

Carina Bossu (iD)

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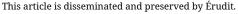# Book Review: Contextualised Open Educational Practices: Towards Student Agency and Self-Directed Learning

Editors: Jako Olivier, Charlene du Toit-Brits, Byron J. Bunt, and Amit Dhakulkar (AOSIS Books, 2022), ISBN: 9781779952653 (pdf). https://books.aosis.co.za/index.php/ob/catalog/book/345

Reviewed by: Carina Bossu, *The Open University*

Introduction

The book *Contextualised Open Educational Practices: Towards Student Agency and Self-Directed Learning* is a valuable resource for anyone interested in enhancing open educational practices (OEP) in various educational settings, in particular in open and distance learning. The book is edited by Jako Olivier, Charlene du Toit-Brits, Byron J. Bunt, and Amit Dhakulkar and was published in 2022 by AOSIS Books in Cape Town.

This volume is part of the North-West University (NWU) Self-Directed Learning Series. In it, the authors explore the application of OEP in enhancing students' agency and self-directed learning (SDL). The book is built on the premise that education needs to be relevant to the learners' context of learning. The authors argue that OEP provides learners with opportunities to co-create knowledge with their peers, learn at their pace, and leverage multiple sources of knowledge to contextualise their learning experiences. The book follows a unique format, exploring different aspects of the NWU OER Fellowship programme, which supported academic staff at NWU in developing diverse OEP projects and initiatives involving their students.

Book Structure

This book comprises 10 chapters, each exploring a different aspect of OEP in promoting student agency and self-directed learning. The first chapter is crucial for readers to understand the context of the OER Fellowship programme, as it offers an overview of the programme, its theoretical foundation, and the outline of the process followed. It includes qualitative analysis of perceptions about the initiative from the fellows themselves. The importance of positive interdependence within groups and the motivating effect of expert inputs and financial incentives are significant findings. Additionally, the responses from participants reveal unique methods of promoting student agency and implementing localisation, which are further explored in other chapters of the book.

Chapter 2 delves into the unique context of South Africa, focusing on multilingual digital education in higher education and its connection to social justice through localised self-directed OEP. The chapter begins with an overview of the broader multilingual context in South Africa and then clarifies the role

of OER and OEP in promoting social justice and opportunities for language harmonisation. In addition to providing a theoretical foundation for subsequent chapters on localisation, this chapter offers practical recommendations for implementing self-directed OEP in similar contexts.

Chapter 3 expands on the theoretical foundation of open educational resources (OER) by specifically examining their definition, the needs they address, the benefits they offer, and the challenges associated with their use, all while establishing a clear connection with self-directed learning (SDL). The chapter thoroughly explores the benefits that OER provides for students, highlighting the significance of initiatives like the NWU OER Fellowship and others that share a similar purpose. Through this literature review, several gaps and potential future research and development opportunities emerge regarding OER and its intersections with SDL. The chapter ends with some proposed solutions for practitioners and other stakeholders to overcome some of the challenges facing OEP.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide readers with practical examples of implementing OER initiatives, not only with a focus on SDL, but also with social justice at their hearts. In Chapter 4, the authors describe the process of creating a glossary within the realm of philosophy, translating its content into several South African languages, and subsequently sharing it. The authors also acknowledge the need to consider translation challenges, in particular standardized representations, and question the historical roots of certain concepts and dominant narratives. Chapter 5 explores the design of an OER as part of a technology-enhanced practice environment aimed at improving the oral competence of beginner French language learners. The motivation behind developing this OER, which involved creating open-source software, was the necessity to enhance oral communication skills in a foreign language, particularly given the limited classroom time and speaking opportunities typically available for foreign language learners. The chapter also outlines the various stages involved in developing a context-specific OER that adheres to sound instructional design principles and OEP.

Remarkable examples of OER co-creation are explored in chapters 6, 7, and 8. Chapter 6 reports on an empirical investigation of a project which involved the co-creation of an open textbook by a lecturer and their students, in an attempt to decolonise the journalism curriculum. This is an important example of how fostering SDL as part of an OEP project to create learning material can play a significant role in student agency and decolonising curricula. In Chapter 7, authors discuss the "Singing Feelings" project, which focuses on student-generated stories as OER. The project encourages students to create open educational music resources (OEMRs) centred around socio-emotional learning for an online platform. Adopting a qualitative narrative inquiry, authors suggest that through personal stories, meaningful learning experiences can be designed, raising awareness of the value of OER and promoting innovative opportunities for creating OEMRs, empowering student agency. Another example of learner co-creation of content and knowledge is explained in Chapter 8, which examines the perceptions of second-year health and social care students engaging with and developing OER in an interprofessional collaborative learning environment. The study aims to understand the use of OEP in collaborative learning settings. Findings indicate that OEP offers opportunities for applying knowledge, fostering cooperation and collaboration, and empowering students through the co-creation of knowledge as OER. The study also identified some challenges that can inform future similar OEP initiatives.

Chapter 9 explores a project in health and focuses on the development of an OER as a tool for raising awareness of infectious diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and COVID-19. The chapter discusses the gap between information and understanding in these areas and explores the role of OER, specifically open education games, in creating awareness. The final chapter examines how decolonial

practices can contribute to researching OER and developing open legal pedagogies from a South African perspective. It discusses epistemic injustice as a central issue in decolonising the curriculum and emphasizes epistemic justice and access to open legal education. The chapter proposes a framework for an inclusive learning environment using a decolonial approach with OER and OEP. It also addresses teaching and student agency within a South African university and concludes with a discussion on OER as a tool for social justice and its role in developing open legal resources and pedagogy.

Significance

This book explores key OEP initiatives supported by the NWU OER Fellowship programme. The Fellowship programme itself is innovative and a strategic way to build capacity in and encourage university educators to engage with OER and OEP, as suggested by previous research in the field (Bossu, Brown, & Bull, 2014). The OER Fellowship programme is a commendable institutional-wide initiative, and I hope more institutions will follow NWU's lead. By developing a book about some of the Fellowship initiatives, NWU gives readers an overview of what can be achieved and how students can benefit from OEP engagement, including co-creation of knowledge and promotion of self-directed learning. The book is a valuable resource for educators, educational researchers, and policymakers who want to promote self-directed learning and OEP. It offers practical examples and theoretical insights into how OEP can be implemented in various educational contexts, in particular in open and distance-learning contexts.

References

Bossu, C., Brown, M., & Bull, D. (2014). *Feasibility protocol for OER and OEP: A decision making tool for higher education*. Sydney: Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. https://ltr.edu.au/resources/CG10_1687_Bossu_Feasibility%20Protocol_2014.pdf