Open Educational Resources and MOOCs: Examining the Changing Face of Content Delivery in Higher Education

Howard Miller
Mercy College, New York

Jordan Jay
Lincoln University, Missouri

Three years ago, in June of 2012, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) set forth a list of ten recommendations in support of Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which had been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 on the heels of World War II. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is a soaring document that envisions a world where freedom and dignity, safety and security, are viewed as the norm. Among the 30 articles that comprise the Declaration, the one that is most germane to this issue of *Global Education Review* is that of Article 26, which states that "everyone has the right to education" (United Nations, 1948). Of course, back in 1948, no one was thinking about the application of this principle to higher education beyond the notion that it must be "equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." While accessibility to higher education remains a significant issue globally, a vast majority of institutions serving the educational needs and interests of post-secondary students at present are less bastions of meritocracy than they are pathways to knowledge and skills necessary for the workplace and for the possibility of upward mobility that is linked to the kinds of

employment that require a college education. By the time of the 2012 UNESCO World Open Educational Resources (OER) Congress in Paris, the concept of "access" had become more focused on the delivery of instruction to the widest possible audience.

Conceptually, that is exactly what the OER movement has been about, the free access to educational tools, resources, and content to the widest possible audience, with a general call for the democratization of higher education. Specifically, the World OER Congress called for:

a. A universal fostering awareness and use of OER
b. Enabling the use of Information and Communications Technologies
c. Reinforcing and development of strategies and policies on the use of OER
d. Promoting the understanding and use of open licensing frameworks
e. Supporting capacity building for the development of quality learning materials
f. Fostering strategic alliances for the widespread use of OER

_____

Corresponding Author:
Howard Miller, Mercy College School of Education, 555 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522
Email: hmiller@mercy.edu

g. Encouraging the development and adaptation on OER across languages and cultures

h. Encouraging research on OER

i. Facilitating finding, retrieving, and sharing of OER

j. Encouraging the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds

As editors of this themed issue of *Global Education Review*, itself an electronic journal that follows the precepts of OER by providing immediate open access to its content in support of a global exchange of knowledge, we issued our call for manuscripts a year ago. We are pleased to be in a position of supporting item "h" from the list above by "encouraging research on OER" and commend readers to the five articles we have selected for inclusion.

A good place to start would be with "Open Educational Resources: American Ideals, Global Questions," in which Steven Weiland examines the tensions embodied in the struggle between the idealistic goals of OER (and its most expansive manifestation in the realm of MOOCs, or Massive Online Open Courses), striving to promote greater freedom, access, and democratization in the face of barriers imposed by the power mongering that cannot be ignored or easily surmounted over local control of people, information, and access by governments and institutions. The editors wonder, too, whether the values of OER are truly embodied when elite, mostly American universities offer their versions of intact courses – even freely and openly – to all who wish (and have the necessary technology) to avail themselves of them. Whose perspective and values are being promulgated, and whose voices are not heard within the grasp of the vast tentacles of the MOOC?

Also examining MOOCs, though from another perspective, are Lorena Yadira Alemán de la Garza, Teresa Sancho-Vinuesa Sancho-Vinuesa, and Marcela Georgina Gómez Zermeño,

whose article "Atypical: Analysis of a Massive Open Online Course with a Relatively High Rate of Program Completers" asks what it is that led one particular MOOC that the researchers studied to have a comparatively high rate of success in a field where program completers are few and far between. Their research addresses, at least in part, questions the editors share about the impact of MOOCs in situations where many enter but most do not stay for very long.

It may be, as has been suggested, that MOOCs serve an entirely different and unanticipated purpose and audience than traditional higher education programs, including those that offer their courses online, by allowing an already-existing workforce to hone its skills in a particular area of need or interest. Such a purpose may very well fill a niche market, but it is far removed from the goal of making higher education accessible to all.

In "Examining the Relations among Student Motivation, Engagement, and Retention in a MOOC: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach," researchers Yao Xiong, Hongli Li, Mindy L. Kornhaber, Hoi K. Suen, Barton Pursel, Deborah D. Goins, also express concern at the low retention rates among participants in MOOCs, and have focused their study on the relationship between participants' motivation and their engagement and persistence.

The editors have long questioned the potential for loss of local autonomy (among institutions, but even more, among faculty) in a scenario whereby higher education becomes a near monopoly of a few conglomerates able to sustain the MOOC structure. Thus, we are pleased that two of the articles move us from the theoretical to the practical side, and offer models that demonstrate how higher education programs are able to retain the benefits of OERs without participating in the rarified atmosphere of the MOOC. In "Private Cloud Communities for Faculty and Students," authors Daniel R. Tomal and Cynthia Grant offer an alternative to MOOCs, which, owing to their massive size,

require massive infrastructure and technological and academic support. Instead, they posit, private cloud communities capture the concept of the MOOC while focusing on meeting the needs of enrolled students. In "Critical Spaces for Critical Times: Global Conversations in Literacy Research as an Open Professional Development and Practices Resource," the team of Peggy Albers, A. Ram Cho, Ji Hye Shin, Myoung Eun Pang, Dennis Murphy Odo, Jin Kyeong Jung, Christi L. Pace, Mandi Sena, and Sarah Turnbull provides an in-depth look at a web seminar series that draws upon the talents of internationally recognized scholars in the field of education, thereby offering up an extensive array of intellectual resources within a manageable system of infrastructure.

Finally, this issue also contains a "bonus article" that reminds us of the responsibilities we also have toward improving student learning at the elementary and secondary education levels. Titled "McREL Leadership Responsibilities Through the Lens of Data: The Critical Nine," the article by Cheryl James-Ward and Joy Abuyen analyzes the impact of identified school leadership qualities on student achievement.

As we conclude our year of reading submissions and preparing this edition of *Global Education Review*, we want to return to our initial call for papers by encouraging continued research into the use of OERs, MOOCs, and other efforts to move us toward a more universally educated world, in the hopes of contributing to the fulfillment of the goals embodied in the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

References

United Nations. Declaration of human rights. Retrieved August 22, 2015
from http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2012 Paris OER declaration. Retrieved August 22, 2015
from http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/WPFD2009/English_Declaration.html

About the Authors

Howard Miller, EdD, Professor of Education at Mercy College, is chair of the Department of Secondary Education.

Jordan Jay, PhD, is Professor of Education at Lincoln University, Missouri