

SIG Report

Learning through Sharing: Open Resources, Open Practices, Open Communication

Teacher Education and Computer-Mediated Communication SIGs joint event

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For the third consecutive year (after Lyon and Barcelona), the Teacher Education and CMC SIGs organised a joint annual Seminar, which took place at the University of Bologna on 29 and 30 March. The theme chosen for this year's event was Openness as a way of learning through sharing.

Open Educational Resources (OER) are defined as "materials used to support education that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared by anyone" (Downes, 2011). Open Educational Practices (OEP) are practices which "support the production, use and reuse of high quality OER through institutional policies, which promote innovative pedagogical models, and respect and empower learners as co-producers on their lifelong learning path." (ICDE, 2011). Open Communication is reciprocal and respectful exchange which contributes to social presence in online learning (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997), and the development of intercultural awareness and competence in language learning.

One of the affordances of the web is that it provides easy access to knowledge, and this constitutes one of its greatest potential to transform education. "A culture of sharing resources and practices will help facilitate change and innovation in education" (OER Commons, 2011). Open access initiatives to make research publications freely available online or the adoption of open source software solutions, such as Moodle or Mahara, are already having a significant impact on education. Flickr, iTunes U or YouTube, all based on the idea of sharing content openly, can also provide excellent resources for teachers and learners. The web also offers unprecedented access to interlocutors from different cultures and contexts, and open environments with multimodal channels for communication which can be harnessed for language and intercultural development.

The two-day seminar focused on the impact of adopting openness as a key principle in education. Together, we explored how open resources, open practices and open communication can be integrated in language teaching and learning, and in the initial and continuing development of language teachers.

The main themes discussed were:

- theories that underpin openness as a key principle in education
- using of OER in teaching and/or course development, including reusing and re-purposing existing resources for different contexts or resource-based learning
- integrating learner-generated content into language courses
- developing a culture of sharing amongst the teaching community (barriers to and advantages of sharing)

- sharing resources and/or practices in teacher education (e.g. through peer review of resources)
- sharing resources and intellectual capital with others to raise individual or institutional profiles (e.g. through publishing resources on iTunes U, or through a resource repository, open access publishing of research papers)
- promoting learner communication in 'open' environments (e.g. through online gaming, virtual worlds, international discussion boards, blogs ...)
- facilitating open communication in CMC - where 'sensitive' topics can be broached and diverse opinions are valued.

The nearly eighty proposals arriving not only from all over Europe, but also from Japan, Egypt, India and the USA were a testimony to the interest that the two Eurocall Special Interest Groups have raised in the recent years, as well as to the significance that the concept of Openness is acquiring worldwide.

The new format proposed also proved highly successful: the authors of the forty-one abstracts selected were required to prepare short 'working' papers which were made available to all participants one month before the conference. Thus, the presentations – whose purpose was simply to refresh the audience's memory - were reduced to a few minutes, leaving over half an hour per session to the discussion. In addition, each session put together three papers under a common theme, drawing out common issues as well as diverse approaches.

The workshop also included two plenary talks by Eleonora Pantò, who provided an overview of the Openness movement in education, and Russell Stannard, who demonstrated tools that can be used in language teaching and learning.

A selection of the papers will also be published in two Special Issues (one dedicated to CMC and Open Communication, and one to OERs and OEPs) of the open-access Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society. An e-book of case-studies of Open Educational Resources and Practices, targeted at practitioners, is also in preparation.

For further information, <http://eurocallsigsbologna.weebly.com>

References

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