

# Motivations to deposit: Two approaches to Open Educational Resources (OER) within Languages and Social Sciences (LSS) at Aston University

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## Keywords

Open Educational Resources, sharing, languages, discourse analysis, Social Sciences, English, Humanities, Humbox, LLAS, C-SAP

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2009, the School of Languages and Social Sciences (LSS)<sup>1</sup> at Aston University responded to a JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) and Higher Education Academy (HEA) call for partners in Open Educational Resources (OER) projects. This led to participation in not one, but *two* different OER projects from within one small School of the University.

This paper will share, from this unusual position, the experience of our English tutors, who participated in the HumBox<sup>2</sup> Project, led by Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) and will compare the approach taken with the Sociology partnership in the C-SAP OER Project<sup>3</sup>, led by the Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP). These two HEA Subject Centre-led projects have taken different approaches to the challenges of encouraging tutors to deposit teaching resources, as an ongoing process, for others to openly access, download and re-purpose. As the projects draw to a close, findings will be discussed, in relation to the JISC OER call, with an emphasis on examining the *language* and *discourses* from the two collaborations to see where there are shared issues and outcomes, or different subject specific concerns to consider.

### 1.1 The Background

It is acknowledged that the language used to discuss repositories and open access educational resources can mean quite different things to different groups. There are also many sensitivities concerning making educational material public (Rothery & Hayes, 2008). The C-SAP and Humbox OER Projects have each sought to reveal the embedded pedagogical assumptions within the example learning materials shared, and acknowledge learning design to try to reduce barriers to sharing. A strong element within both project collaborations has been the sense of subject community (Wenger, 2002), as discussed in the 'Good Intentions' report for JISC. Ownership and trust are identified by many studies as crucial requirements for sharing, together with a resource collection built up by the subject group providing a shared focus (Currier, Duncan, & Douglas, 2008).

### 1.2 The approaches of the Humbox and C-SAP OER Projects

The Humbox Project adopted a *practical approach*, with 11 partners within universities across the UK, *encouraged to deposit Humanities resources from the start, in an easy to use repository*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www1.aston.ac.uk/lss/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.humbox.ac.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/subject\\_areas/elearning/oer/](http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/subject_areas/elearning/oer/)

(HumBox). HumBox is a Web 2.0 style repository, adapted from Eprints open source software, developed by Southampton University. Support for both technical issues and process-related concerns was provided, along with a peer review facility. Space to experiment, prior to the release of content, was provided and depositors actively helped to refine the key features of the collaboration. At Aston University, the English lecturers contributed their TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) materials to Humbox and were interested to know how the collaboration might broaden the range of resources that might be offered to their distance learning students.

*“One of the reasons I am excited about Humbox is because of the potential I see for the distance learning programmes that we run here”* Dr Fiona Copland, LSS, Aston University

The Humbox launch for open access was on 26 February 2010 in Sheffield.

The C-SAP OER project has been evaluating the process of opening up resources for learning and teaching in the Social Sciences, with 6 core project partners across the country. This project has sought *to develop an appreciation of the cultural shift required to move from an individualised activity to a more dialogical production of teaching resources*. A key aim has been to:-

*“use the analytical tools of the Social Science disciplines to help make current tacit knowledge visible”* (C-SAP),

to inform production of learning materials and effective reuse. The emphasis has been on adopting a learning design approach which considers how teaching materials might be designed *for reuse*. One output is a toolkit that focuses on readiness to share and includes tools to help Social Science staff review their teaching and learn about the benefits of OER. Another important consideration has been whether there are in fact issues that are *particular* to the Social Sciences, when assessing feasibility of design for OER.

Resources from C-SAP partners will go into the JorumOpen repository.

### 1.3 Conclusions

Whether contributing teaching materials to JorumOpen, or to Humbox, there has been active discussion amongst the respective partners in these two OER collaborations. Debates about the processes involved in depositing teaching materials for open re-use via repositories have been captured via a *C-SAP wiki* and *Humbox Basecamp*. Therefore some basic analysis of this discourse from within these online discussion texts, from the Humbox and C-SAP OER Projects, using a simple tool for corpus analysis, called AntConc, will be included in this paper. A ‘corpus’ is the Latin term for a ‘body of texts’. Such discourse can be systematically searched and compared to determine patterns of authentic language use and *quantities* of particular terms. This can help identify which ‘buzz words’ occur *and in what context* and where there may be ‘dominant’ voices.

The OER Programme<sup>4</sup>, for those participating in LSS, began with a debate about ‘teaching materials’, it has to, as this is what is being sought from people, *open access to their teaching materials*. In looking at the language surrounding just these two words alone, as they are central to the OER debate, ‘teaching’ and ‘materials’ can bring with them, in discourse, much to aid our understanding of ‘where people are’ in relation to this complex agenda.

Given that discourses carry a contextual, ideological and historical perspective, and the fluid interplay of language in use, (Santos, McAndrew, & Godwin, 2007) these multi-disciplinary conversations about OER provide useful material from the projects for a discourse analysis. There is not scope within this short paper to offer anything more than the most basic of introductions to some techniques by which the various ‘voices’ from current OER projects might be explored. Findings will only suggest therefore what might be possible from research of this nature, and further exploration by the authors is intended, as well as dissemination at future OER related events.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/oer>

The anonymous, quantitative results from this small study will hence be presented as data to invite further discussion on the patterns in language that emerge. Could corpus analysis of discussions about OER help inform us on where we should concentrate future activities and funding? Has this JISC-funded project research into the release of open resources helped to reduce the perceived barriers to sharing amongst the academics taking part? Or is further culture change required and what are the prospects for *sustainability*? Conclusions will be drawn from staff who have participated from the School of Languages and Social Sciences at Aston and from the C-SAP and LLAS HEA partners, and subject centre staff who have led the collaboration.

## 2. SHARED RESOURCES, UNSHARED LANGUAGE?

### 2.1 What do we mean by OER?

A frequently used definition of OER is, “digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research” (OECD, 2007).

Both Humbox and C-SAP project discussions began in early 2009 with careful consideration of what offering such materials *freely* might mean for the academics preparing them for release and re-use.

### 2.2 The JISC OER briefing paper

These projects began initially with scrutiny of the JISC OER briefing paper to discuss practicalities in both applying for this funding and then meeting JISC requirements. Discussion about the present structure and location of the teaching materials to be contributed and how to transfer pedagogical information, particularly the tacit, embedded assumptions that a tutor would relate to his/her resources was expressed by partners in both projects.

The aims of this JISC OER pilot were outlined at a briefing meeting in January 2009:-

“to support institutions, consortia and individuals to release open educational resources for use and repurposing worldwide, by assisting the development of appropriate processes and policies to make this process an integral part of the learning material creation workflow” (JISC, 2008)

An emphasis was placed in the briefing paper on taking an innovative approach to hosting and metadata, with minimal level tags such as ‘ukoer’, title of resource, author information and subject area being the most basic requirements. However in aiming to encourage ease of deposit, and quickly build a collection, the ‘pedagogic metadata’, usually of real interest to a tutor wishing to repurpose a resource such as a Powerpoint lecture, can unfortunately be omitted.

In order to try to address this, to some extent, a peer review approach was suggested, where resources would be initially assessed by project partners for potential re-usability. The lack of clarity of ownership of many academic resources would be addressed as a part of this review process, together with use of creative commons licenses. Outputs from this pilot year with regard to copyright and IPR would be fed back into the UK creative commons group.

In short, the intention was to find out ‘what works’ in the OER process and to consider what cultural changes might also be required in order to motivate people towards an OER approach.

### 2.3 Why are teaching resources not shared much ‘openly’ in the UK?

Motivation to deposit *teaching resources* in repositories of any kind has been minimal in the UK, despite many funded projects in recent years offering *technical* solutions. These projects have often focused on the *platform* that will be used to store the resources, coming later to examine reasons why items have not been uploaded.

Some of the *tutor barriers* have included concerns about potential misuse of their materials, anxieties about the quality of resource design, possible and often inadvertent copyright infringement and, not least, the time involved in uploading, even if a desire to share materials is clearly established.

It would also be fair to comment that for many lecturers, despite a rapidly increasing array of free-to-access learning materials available, it is quite possible that many still do not ‘see the point’. Potential benefits are not apparent if your teaching is already successful. Why change anything?

Stephen Downes declared that learning design itself is simply incompatible with re-use:

“Learning design and reusability are incompatible. Design requires specificity, and specificity prohibits resuability” (Downes, 2003)

It is that very specificity, and perhaps the relationship that flows between lecturers and students that should be the actual starting point to any discussion about the value, or not, of a plethora of open educational resources. If we do not begin with the teacher perspective, and closely related learner benefits, then who will use the materials?

There are also many *technical barriers* to allowing the ideals of OER to flourish. Stuart Lee, writing a chapter entitled ‘The Gates Are Shut’, within *Opening Up Education* (2008), reminds us of the complexity of higher education roles, citing an example of a tutor teaching on a particular module within a learning management system (LMS) which is considered a user-friendly ‘personalized’ area for the students. If the tutor decides to refer the students to a useful example within another discipline and suggests consulting particular resources on that module:

“When the student logs on they may well find their way barred, the gates closed, because the system only recognizes them as a student of one discipline. Educational resources then, even within the institution, are not “open.” They are controlled, managed, restricted, and channelled.” (Lee, 2008)

“Additionally, although LMS and VLE systems may have originated from academic projects, within universities, many are now multi-million dollar international companies.” (Lee, 2008)

The economic implications and interests are complex, and for tutors, who during the last decade have been encouraged to deposit resources via a VLE, *for their students alone*, it has made little sense to upload elsewhere, for altruistic reasons.

Certainly for some lecturers, who liaise on a regular basis for teaching, with communities and organisations outside of university, VLEs have not been an entirely helpful progression. More open systems would have allowed regular participation and interaction for students on modules where professional colleagues in, for example, the health service, police or schools and colleges could also have participated.

If progress is to take place, or at least answers to be sought, about the feasibility of the open sharing of teaching resources in mainstream higher education, tracing what teachers actually do, how they do it and why they would consider making any changes would seem to be important activities. Furthermore, what they do within different disciplines might also vary considerably, as might the related discourse.

## 2.4 Why consider a ‘critical’ discourse analysis (CDA) approach to OER?

The *language* that has been in use now for a number of years, in relation to more traditional, largely ‘library’ type in focus, repositories for both research, and learning and teaching purposes, can create barriers to sharing resources, as people simply do not understand the terminology. For example, ‘metadata’, ‘reusable learning object’, ‘interoperability standards’, to name a few, have been dominant terms that are unfamiliar to lecturers. In terms of *learning and teaching* repository discussions, these words do seem to be finally slipping a little from use in the UK. Instead, as many repositories become more ‘Web 2.0’ in style, and about ‘personal ownership’ in focus, the use of terms like ‘tagging’ and ‘reviewing’, ‘commenting’, ‘subject community’ and ‘social networking’ are more frequently heard. Indeed it was observed at a recent repository discussion event in Worcester<sup>5</sup> that even the word ‘sharing’ has not been of primary concern in some learning and teaching repository reports and discussions of late. The process of sharing no longer needs to be discussed, it seems, as a ‘desirable phenomenon’ assumed unattainable, no matter what approach is taken.

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<sup>5</sup>“Learning and Teaching Repositories: is this the last chance?” Repository Symposium Event, Worcester <http://wlbrproject.wordpress.com/learning-and-teaching-repositories-is-this-the-last-chance/symposium-presentations/>

It is therefore the intention in the next section to compare some of the discourse from the C-SAP and HumBox projects to see what patterns emerge in the use of language and in turn to see how this may vary, or overlap, with the JISC/HEFCE/HEA agenda. A *critical* approach to discourse analysis will enable an examination of the social, cultural and political environment around OER as an 'interpretive resource' (Mautner, 2005). Fowler suggests that the speaker "embodies in language his experience of the phenomena" (Fowler, 1991) If this is the case, a closer scrutiny of the OER discourse might enable analysis of "opaque relationships of dominance" (Wodak, 2001), if these should exist. Whilst releasing open educational resources for all to access would appear to be a worthy enterprise, there may be other factors at stake that, at first glance, are not apparent.

The simple methods used to collect and search the discussion texts for quantitative data will now be described. Then one example of a search on the words 'teaching' and 'materials' will be provided to illustrate how basic analysis techniques might be applied. If there are barriers, or opportunities, or perceived benefits, what are people saying about the 'OER experience' so far? What can the discourse tell us?

### 3. CORPUS TOOLS FOR OER DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 A simple approach using AntConc for analyzing comparable corpora

This may at first appear a little unrelated to a paper about repositories and open educational resources. This section will show how a simple corpus tool was used to examine and search the texts from the spontaneous discussion comments that participants posted to the C-SAP wiki and HumBox Basecamp. These were then compared to the JISC/HEFCE/HEA documents that invited participation and have since offered updates on OER progress. Those involved in the C-SAP and Humbox projects have given their permission for such analysis and the JISC/HEFCE/HEA documents are freely available to read on the web and have been listed in the references section of this paper.

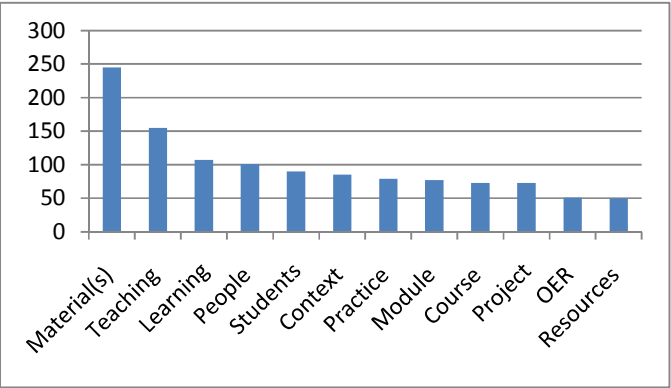
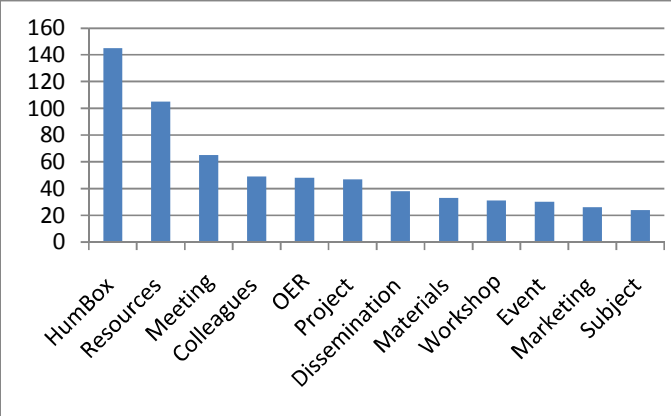
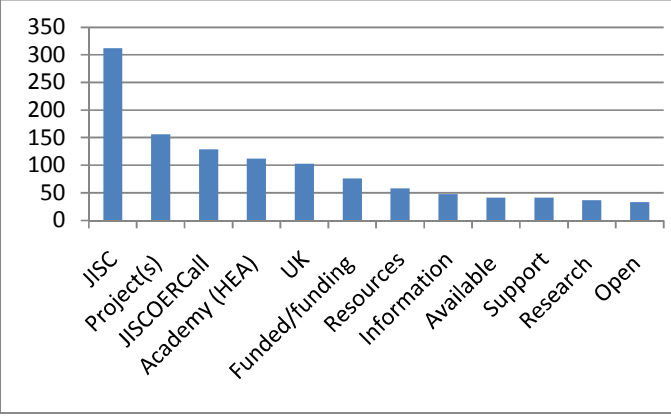
So firstly, what is AntConc? AntConc is a freeware concordance program, a useful tool essentially, that can be downloaded from <http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/> and can quickly provide a comparison of texts, which can in turn reveal 'points of interest' for analysis of the discourse within. For example, repeated use of certain words or phrases may merit further enquiry, particularly when 'collocation', the juxtaposition of these words together with others, co-occurs more often than might be expected by chance. Such quantitative patterns can be observed and commented on using techniques defined for the analysis of discourse.

What is the difference between language and discourse? Essentially, discourse is language in real contexts of use, which for this purpose, is providing the data for analysis from the discussion texts about OERs. Discourse is a particular way of constructing a domain of social practice (Fairclough, 1995) and critical discourse analysis asserts that dominant ideologies might be 'sustained through textual practice' (Simpson & Mayr, 2010)

Therefore the study of this discourse may reveal how social practices, in relation to OERS are regulated, how identities are created and linked with other contexts. *Interdiscursivity* refers to the relationship of discourse with other discourses and the resulting interplay. Examples of where the discourse overlaps and is related to other discourses can be seen within the discussion texts below. The analysis of discourse can go further than simply describing linguistic features of texts, it can pinpoint where there is an imbalance, or some inequality in the spread of power or authority. What implications this may have for OER will be discussed in the conclusions with a recommendation that further studies be undertaken to reveal where the range of motivations lie for participation.

#### 3.2 The process followed for this study

Organising the texts to be analysed is an important first practical step. All discussion postings to both the C-SAP wiki and HumBox Basecamp forums were saved into separate folders as .txt files using Notepad. AntConc can easily generate lists of words and their frequency of use. Below are the word counts of *frequencies of the 12 most popular words* from the three separate searches:-

<p><b>The C-SAP OER discourse</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr><td><b>Material(s)</b></td><td><b>245</b></td></tr> <tr><td>Teaching</td><td>155</td></tr> <tr><td>Learning</td><td>107</td></tr> <tr><td>People</td><td>101</td></tr> <tr><td>Students</td><td>90</td></tr> <tr><td>Context</td><td>85</td></tr> <tr><td>Practice</td><td>79</td></tr> <tr><td>Module</td><td>77</td></tr> <tr><td>Course</td><td>73</td></tr> <tr><td>Project</td><td>73</td></tr> <tr><td>OER</td><td>51</td></tr> <tr><td><b>Resources</b></td><td><b>50</b></td></tr> </table>	<b>Material(s)</b>	<b>245</b>	Teaching	155	Learning	107	People	101	Students	90	Context	85	Practice	79	Module	77	Course	73	Project	73	OER	51	<b>Resources</b>	<b>50</b>	 <table border="1"> <caption>Data for C-SAP OER discourse bar chart</caption> <thead> <tr><th>Term</th><th>Frequency</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Material(s)</td><td>245</td></tr> <tr><td>Teaching</td><td>155</td></tr> <tr><td>Learning</td><td>107</td></tr> <tr><td>People</td><td>101</td></tr> <tr><td>Students</td><td>90</td></tr> <tr><td>Context</td><td>85</td></tr> <tr><td>Practice</td><td>79</td></tr> <tr><td>Module</td><td>77</td></tr> <tr><td>Course</td><td>73</td></tr> <tr><td>Project</td><td>73</td></tr> <tr><td>OER</td><td>51</td></tr> <tr><td>Resources</td><td>50</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Term	Frequency	Material(s)	245	Teaching	155	Learning	107	People	101	Students	90	Context	85	Practice	79	Module	77	Course	73	Project	73	OER	51	Resources	50
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In themselves, the above frequencies do not offer a lot to go on, except in showing initially where the *most* emphasis seems to be: in C-SAP discussion on the *Materials*, and what these represent to those involved, in HumBox on the *HumBox* itself (through which the materials will be released) and in the JISC documents: the *JISC* (Joint Information Systems Committee), the funding body.

The *lowest frequencies* in this sample were: in C-SAP discussion on the *Resources*, in HumBox on the *Subject* and in the JISC documents: on the word *Open*.

In a bigger study these observations would be useful leads for further analysis. It is important though to clearly emphasise here that, whilst tools like Antconc can quickly sort useful quantitative data from discourse, a “critical interpretation requires historical knowledge and sensitivity which can be possessed by human beings and not by machines” (Fowler, 1991). Therefore, the automated process of searching the discourse is just a ‘first step’ to finding points of interest in the body of qualitative data where collocation and other features might be examined.

### 3.3 Moving from frequencies to collocation

Repeated use of certain words or phrases invites further enquiry. The *collocation*, or juxtaposition of the words listed above, together with others, could reveal areas for further analysis. Given that there is limited scope for detailed analysis in a short paper, the two most frequently used words from the C-SAP wiki discussions: ‘teaching’ and ‘materials’, will be chosen as a ‘first line of enquiry’ just to see what emerges from the comments that surround usage of these *in each of the three areas of comparison*. A window of 1000 words has been allowed to ensure that some breadth of context can also be identified. In the next section some of these comments will be examined and compared as we get deeper into the OER discourse.

## 4 GETTING DEEPER INTO THE DISCOURSE

The search on the terms ‘teaching’ and ‘materials’ has been selected for initial enquiries, as teaching materials are essentially the ‘bread and butter’ where the OER Programme in the UK is concerned. If no one deposits their teaching materials for open use then we can expect a rather short pilot programme!

What has been fascinating already, however, is that things have quickly moved beyond a requirement to deposit resources alone, in return for funding. The discourse below reveals glimpses into the sort of conversations that a discussion about **teaching materials** has provoked. For each person contributing these comments, it is important to remember that *within and around the words there is a social context*. This includes personal history and understanding, institutional concerns and constraints, a unique relationship with their own students and colleagues, a personal teaching philosophy and their own motivations for participating in their broad subject community. Furthermore, the multiple roles we each hold could potentially enable insights to different views of the world in moving from one mode of discourse to another, but Fowler states: “people are not terribly conscious of linguistic variety” (Fowler, 1991)

### 4.1 Getting deeper into the C-SAP discourse

With this in mind, we will now examine the C-SAP online discussion paragraphs around use of the words ‘teaching’ and ‘materials’. These words are shown in bold to aid the identification of where they occur and the context they occur in.

1. *“To some extent re-usability and shared resources involve the same issues. These debates clearly turn on the sorts of things that other contributors have discussed—ownership, power relations and the like. Perhaps I can summarise my own views briefly by saying that I hope this whole exercise will reopen possibilities which had been closed off by universities and publishers wanting to manage bureaucratically, constrain and hide resources away.*

*In the context of my own **teaching** practice, I want to use openly accessible resources to encourage students to be ‘syllabus independent’, or, less grandly, to be able to find good quality **materials** in a convenient electronic form, to wean them away from their current inefficient search strategies, which consists of typing key terms into Google and using whatever comes up. For instance, during discussions within the project team, we commented on the fact that a lot of **teaching materials** we*

received are embedded in the context of a particular institution and rely on implicit pedagogic assumptions.

2. I think that **teaching materials** are always embedded in contexts, and that users need to read them critically so as to identify both contextual elements and pedagogic assumptions. It is not always unhelpful to see the effect of context on other people's work, of course in that makes you realise those effects operate with your own work. The same goes with implicit pedagogic assumptions. I think it can be particularly helpful to students to realise that there are certain contingent elements to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and I think the project team might consider adding some encouragement for basic techniques for students to do that with our **materials**.

3. I would like to see OER definitions that include discussions on creativity, subjectivity and more theorised, like for example what does 'exchange' mean, in the context of **teaching**. Here I am biased because my work in anthropology is about exchange and as such it is one of my preoccupations in work and theory overall. I am not sure how OER and discussions about OER are entering larger discussions on pedagogy and **teaching** elsewhere. I am very interested in knowing how theories of pedagogy of **teaching** (large ones) introduce OER to their discussions, in other work, how are our discussions about e-learning, open access and so on understood and seen from an outsider's perspective, people who discuss **teaching** and learning but who are not participants (yet) of projects like OER and so.

4. Yes, a lot of **teaching materials** are embedded in the context of a particular institution and rely on implicit pedagogic assumptions. They also rely on implicit political inequalities, financial or managerial crisis and political (funding, employability, resource allocation) strategies by each particular institution. I believe we put a lot of emphasis on the pedagogic assumptions because we are all concerned, primarily with pedagogy. However, in my experience, the larger political and managerial decisions taken about **teaching** have a strong impact on re-usability, albeit take longer to see their impact. Sometimes I feel that our focus on pedagogy must also include a focus on the larger and political implications of teaching in Higher Education.

5. I would like to have a visual image of all there is in a module that I can transform into a re-usable object, so I can show others easily. Right now I do have a conceptual image but that's harder to extract! And I would like software I can't afford in order to take all my content into presentations. If I had really lots of money I would probably have a site where anyone using it can access anything from it, where there is no restriction of use of software by the user as well as the user that re-uses and produces new things. If I had money I would pay someone at Google to invent a desktop application that can do all software transformations easily whilst incorporating web 2.0 applications all in one. I have two groups in Ning and I belong to another 4 ning groups and as great as it for networking, there is no unification of tasks. I feel I am in too many online spaces at once. It doesn't get solved by having a phone that access them. The same happens with **teaching materials** for OER. I would not like it to be based on an academic institution. I would like it to have the full support of academic institutions but not be funded or stored in a server of which me and my partners have no control and can be switched off by people I don't know at any time. I would like more ownership of the toolkit: not dependent on the funding body and their server.

6. I guess many people are nervous about their **material** seeming mundane, boring, lacking in innovation etc. It raises issues about who OWNS the **materials** - the individual or the institution? I have always found people very helpful in offering to share **materials** with me but at the same time I would NEVER actually ask someone for their **materials** (even though it might be really useful for me)... how do you feel about that? An efficient method of storage, presentation, and access is needed.

7. What about an open access institutional repository for **teaching materials**? One could monitor downloads etc of **materials** and overall traffic as an indication of usage. How do you make this content accessible/searchable. This is linked to the general problem of information overload. There is so much information and links to resources out there. It is hard to know where to go to most conveniently find useful **materials**.

8. I would like to be able to search by assessment in general, not by subject. That would be great! The issue, of course, is one of buy in. With a research repository, staff will put their publications up because that is where the data will be drawn from for the REF, promotions etc etc. What would



encourage academics to upload their **teaching materials**? Grouping resources by module is the default position because that is the structure that constrains and forms our **teaching**. It assumes certain contextual features that are easily identified by module documents. The basic context in which we teach determines much of what we can do and what is appropriate: what preparation students need to take the module, how many weeks of teaching, how many classes/contact hours, what formats the **teaching** takes. Since we design our **teaching** with these constraints in mind, it makes sense to compare to similar units that do the same thing. Even if the context changes, you can see how someone approaches a particular topic. It tends to hold subject specific aspects (somewhat) constant, which makes comparisons easier. Ultimately, these **materials** need to be easy to share. That is more important than cleaning them so thoroughly. I would have to do a lot of cleaning up of my **materials**.

9. I make my **teaching materials** as specific to the year group as possible. So I include even room numbers and time etc and update this each year. This makes more work for me in the long run and I probably should keep those separate as a 'housekeeping appendix' so that is something to think about. In terms of how this should be handled for the OER project, it just has to be stripped out. Each subject in an institution has varying levels of constraints and pressure to conform to common assessment patterns. I suspect that systematic planning of assessment based on learning outcomes is very rare compared to the influence of existing practices and peer pressure.

10. How a module is taught doesn't just depend on the availability of appropriate and useful **materials**. It depends on the dynamism of the teacher, the rapport with the class, the adjustments that need to be made depending on the different needs within a class cohort or in different years.

11. We started from our previous position of wondering about the value of (seemingly) mundane teaching materials. We both found each other's **materials** far more interesting than we at first imagined that we would. Can a PPT be re-used by someone else if it is de-nuded of content? This is a fundamental question. We found each other's **materials** interesting (and useful) but we felt that this was because we share a knowledge base. This knowledge base might be making the **materials** re-useable for us in a way that might not be for others. So do we have to assume a certain level of knowledge/understanding of the subject matter in the potential re-user? We are not writing texts books, we are merely sharing **teaching** ideas and so can we assume that the future users of these materials will also be teachers with a certain knowledge base? We cannot be expected to write copious background notes to explain each artefact but a contextual case study might be useful for each set of **materials** (or some form of caveat to be attached which states that a certain level of knowledge is assumed?). Yet when we thought about this, we compared it to research. When we write and publish our research, we do not necessarily explain the whole background. We assume that the reader will be able to draw on the implicit disciplinary knowledge, and will take responsibility themselves for any 'gaps'. Could this be assumed for any reader of our teaching materials?

12. Are we assuming a shared understanding of delivery - most universities have VLEs, online access to journals, use PowerPoint etc.. Do we all have to follow the same format as each other in the way we construct **materials**? However, not everything is commonly understood - for example language use (Module handbook/outline - terminology!!)

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In brief summary, the C-SAP extracts above range from expressing a wish that OER might:-

*"reopen possibilities which had been closed off by universities and publishers wanting to manage bureaucratically, constrain and hide resources away"*

*"If I had really lots of money I would probably have a site where anyone using it can access anything from it"*

*"The same happens with **teaching materials** for OER. I would not like it to be based on an academic institution. I would like it to have the full support of academic institutions but not be funded or stored in a server of which me and my partners have no control and can be switched off by people I don't know at any time."*

Here the main barriers to OER seem to be concerns that institutional decisions and management might intervene, almost to 're-possess' what has been freely given by tutors. However, as teaching materials are usually deemed to be owned by the university when produced by employees, there are complexities that need to be clarified for tutors to become more at ease about what OER means.

Some further comments remind us that:-

*“teaching materials are always embedded in contexts, and that users need to read them critically so as to identify both contextual elements and pedagogic assumptions.”*

*“Are we assuming a shared understanding of delivery”*

However, on balance:-

*“When we write and publish our research, we do not necessarily explain the whole background.”*

The underlying concern that people's materials might be used indiscriminately, without a sufficiently critical approach that ensures students contest, as well as absorb, knowledge is communicated. However, it is also noted that when research papers are published it is not deemed necessary to explain all of the surrounding details. OER is bringing discussions about the relationship between our research and teaching under the spotlight, not least because there is ever present pressure to publish, whilst also to teach in innovative and engaging ways. What were the HumBox comments on this topic, and where is emphasis placed in that discourse?

## 4.2 Getting deeper into the HumBox discourse

1. *I'd like to ask you the following: Do you think that we may be helping the Humbox to succeed by a) trying to introduce the dissemination of **teaching materials** in School or Faculty's strategy maps? b) trying to convince research units and researchers that impact can be achieved through dissemination in Humbox ? c) trying to convince HEFCE that OERs are a way of to achieve impact that to be recognised in the REF? Or are these efforts in any way incompatible with the community-driven bottom-top approach of Humbox that we all share? A meeting of colleagues involved in uploading resources for this day had to be cancelled as we all were called, exactly at the same time, to extraordinary School Boards where we were informed about the 10% budget savings proposed by our VC. The response from Departments and Schools, in the form of action plans for the implementation of these savings, has been taking up a lot of our energy. An alternative date for the meeting will be arranged soon. 22nd October: Meeting with my deputy Head of School to discuss on Humbox and Research Impact, as he is working on the School response to the REF Consultation.*
2. *Our revised School strategy map does include now a reference to dissemination of **teaching materials** as part of our core activities: “develop and disseminate high quality teaching materials, making innovative use of new technologies where appropriate”.*
3. *I think the Humbox Project Team should discuss whether it is appropriate to submit a response to the HEFCE consultation on the assessment and funding of research by HEFCE [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09\\_38/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_38/) I believe that we can manage to convince HEFCE that publication of research-spun **teaching materials** in Humbox and other OERs is one of the best ways to achieve impact of research in many disciplines. If we were to succeed on this, we would guarantee very high levels of user engagement for the Humbox. Please find attached a draft proposal for a response that I have written for the section of the consultation that concerns us.*
4. *I want people to realise the potential Humbox has in relation to both **teaching** and research and the building of a personal profile that will allow the kinds of cross transfer of knowledge that you refer to. Humbox also provides a superb way for new academic staff on the PG Cert for HE to address the relationship they are required to establish*
5. *I have spoken to relevant colleagues in my Department, School and Faculty, including those with responsibilities for Learning and Teaching at different levels and explored with them the potential benefits that the Humbox can have for our institution and for the specific academic units. We have agreed on some basic questions that we think need to be addressed in the next months, mainly in terms of format and institutional presence ( I reported all these questions in our last 3rd of July LLAS meeting). Overall, though, everyone is very excited about the project and people agree that*

*the basic aims and principles of the HumBox are sound. We've collated our own **teaching materials**, but generally we've been working on getting access to other's.*

*6. We've also disseminated the project information to the institution-wide Learning & Teaching Online Steering Group. Finally, we have at last managed to gain access to our colleague's **materials** held on our institutional VLE, which we are in the process of looking through to select a variety of different types of resource (in the sense of range and content, rather than file type). It has been a bit of a slow start, but we're hoping that the pace will pick up now that the ground is prepared.*

*7. The project has raised the awareness about the need to open our resources to the world and has allowed colleagues to find a safe and very attractive way to do so. The reasons why practitioners decide to share are varied, but the big advantage of the Humbox is that it caters for every member of the **teaching** and learning community.*

*8. Publishing resources in OER is now one of the key points of the Learning and Teaching Strategy of our School.*

*9. The HumBox is a crucial resource for **teaching** and research communities as it helps to release and enhance the potential force of these communities.*

*10. Why are colleagues ready to get involved? The reasons are varied. The first involves an element of pride: there is a willingness to share **teaching** resources when these demonstrate (a) an original and innovative approach to **teaching** (b) the use of original resources which is not easily available (c) a willingness to share research or scholarly-led **teaching** resources (d) a desire to be part of a wider community (especially when opportunities to exchange ideas are limited within the home institution)*

*11. Most colleagues have paid a lot of attention to the resources they up-loaded, as these resources are likely to be formally or informally scrutinised by a wider community. In that case, peer-review has proved to be an excellent feature of the project. In the medium term, the quality of **teaching material** is likely to be improved. To an extent, 'trust' and 'reliability' may prove to be as important as 'diversity of resources' to the overall success of the project. As such, peer-review is one way to 'professionalise' the production of **teaching material** in the way which is not to dissimilar to research peer-review. In that way, what may be initially perceived as a major 'hurdle' ('I will not share for fear to be exposed to the feedback of my peers'), may become a sought-after professional recognition.*

*12. Two light initiatives could be implemented fairly easily (a) to find a way to showcase existing collaboration between institutions on the Humbox itself (b) having a space where people can post something akin to 'a call for papers' with the view to incite participation to a specific project. I will present a paper on this subject to the Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Portsmouth (Faculty of Humanities) 23 June 2010 entitled: OERs and the development of trans-institutional learning communities: the case of HumBox . Abstract: This paper argues that the expansion of OERs is encouraging the development of trans-institutional communities of teachers with three major consequences for learners: (1) **Teaching** resources, with or without learners' input, will become more rigorously peer-reviewed and will be scrutinised by a greater number of actors within and outside HE, within or outside the UK; (2) Sharing **teaching** resources will become common practice, but cultural rather than technical hurdles will have to be negotiated; (3) Whether access to a wide variety of sources will change (a) the way learners engage with their studies, (b) existing learning practice is open to debate. These ideas will be presented with specific references to the HumBox project.*

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To summarise what is only a small percentage of the overall general discourse from the HumBox project, the comments around 'teaching' and 'materials' also led into a discussion about the research-teaching relationship:-

*“Dissemination of teaching materials as part of our core activities”*

[http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09\\_38/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_38/) *“I believe that we can manage to convince HEFCE that publication of research-spun teaching materials in Humbox and other OERs is one of the best ways to achieve impact of research in many disciplines. If we were to succeed on this, we would guarantee very high levels of user engagement for the Humbox.”*

The publishing of teaching materials is described here as a means to increase impact. Recognition for high quality teaching materials might in turn increase the impact of people’s research in their discipline. For those not research active, there is a means to disseminate their teaching approach. Like the C-SAP discourse, there is also reference to the restrictions and constraints within academic institutions:-

*“a desire to be part of a wider community (especially when opportunities to exchange ideas are limited within the home institution)”*

The effect on lecturers in building connections in wider communities and in turn on students’ learning practice is considered:-

*“expansion of OERs is encouraging the development of trans-institutional communities of teachers”*

*“Whether access to a wide variety of sources will change (a) the way learners engage with their studies, (b) existing learning practice is open to debate.”*

The possibilities that the building of communities, through engagement with the HumBox, might offer has been strongly present in this discourse:-

*“Two light initiatives could be implemented fairly easily (a) to find a way to showcase existing collaboration between institutions on the Humbox itself (b) having a space where people can post something akin to ‘a call for papers’ with the view to incite participation to a specific project.”*

*“The reasons why practitioners decide to share are varied, but the big advantage of the Humbox is that it caters for every member of the teaching and learning community.”*

*“The HumBox is a crucial resource for teaching and research communities as it helps to release and enhance the potential force of these communities”*

The next section contains the text around ‘teaching’ and ‘materials’ from the current JISC OER update. This is an initial glimpse at the way that ideas from the initial pilot projects are being consolidated and communicated, much more will soon be available for consideration.

### **4.3 The JISC OER update**

The JISC OER update on activities is available at:-

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/briefingpaper/2010/bpopeneducationalresources.pdf>

*Since April 2009, the Higher Education Academy and JISC have been collaborating on the Open Educational Resources (OER) pilot programme, helping universities to share educational materials freely online. This paper gives an overview of what has been achieved to date.*

*Making educational resources ‘open’ broadens their use and enables them to be repurposed. Through Open Educational Resources, students gain access to a broader range of materials to suit different learning styles and obtain a range of perspectives on individual topics. Academic staff can reuse and repurpose materials rather than needing to develop them from scratch. This frees up time to work on aspects of their work where they can truly add value, such as furthering their research and effectively tutoring their students. Sharing quality learning materials in this way can*

enhance a university's reputation and provide prospective students with a taste of what to expect - a 'shop window' for the university's work.

The focus of the programme is very much on sustainability, so that universities are able to continue sharing **materials** at a similar pace beyond the funding period. Many projects have found the most sustainable approach is to put processes in place to empower academics to release their own educational resources, rather than take on the financial burden of building a centralised team to make materials public.

As well as making more **materials** freely available online, the Open Educational Resources programme has, in some cases, become a catalyst for a change in the way universities operate. Universities have found solutions to complex intellectual property issues. In order to open up their educational resources, they have had to clarify their processes for creating, managing, approving and accrediting academic **materials**, and as a consequence have made their systems more efficient. Moreover, making educational resources more visible encourages proactive quality management, especially when **material** is being used as a marketing tool.

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#### 4.4 Comparing C-SAP and HumBox discourse with the JISC OER update

Whilst it is inevitable that the overall understanding about OER is that *universities* are sharing materials freely online, this does subtly shift the emphasis from the *practitioner* sharing materials discourse discussed so far, to the more official:-

*"helping universities to share educational **materials** freely online"* (JISC OER update)

*"so that universities are able to continue sharing **materials** at a similar pace beyond the funding period"* (JISC OER update)

*"Sharing quality learning **materials** in this way can enhance a university's reputation"*

*"a 'shop window' for the university's work."* (JISC OER update)

*"especially when **material** is being used as a marketing tool."*

This may inadvertently have a deterring effect if too much official marketisation, is felt to be present :-

*"However, in my experience, the larger political and managerial decisions taken about **teaching** have a strong impact on re-usability"*

*"Sometimes I feel that our focus on pedagogy must also include a focus on the larger and political implications of teaching in Higher Education."* (C-SAP)

A personal academic profile though seems to offer both recognition and a spread of knowledge:-

*"the building of a personal profile that will allow the kinds of cross transfer of knowledge"* (HumBox)

But it is noted that possibilities for operational change in HE are unfolding in some cases:-

*"the Open Educational Resources programme has, in some cases, become a catalyst for a change in the way universities operate."* (JISC OER update)

The discourse from the partner discussions around the 'teaching materials' has revealed a range of motivations and overlapping concerns. There seems to be consensus that OER is generally good, but what teaching materials are perceived to represent can differ considerably across the many voices.

## 4.5 Are teaching materials more than just ‘resources’?

Emphasis is placed here on freeing up time in reuse of materials to enable lecturers to really add value:-

*“Academic staff can reuse and repurpose **materials** rather than needing to develop them from scratch. This frees up time to work on aspects of their work where they can truly add value, such as furthering their research and effectively tutoring their students.”* (JISC OER update)

But time involved in repurposing for different needs is also acknowledged by C-SAP :-

*“How a module is taught doesn’t just depend on the availability of appropriate and useful **materials**. It depends on the dynamism of the teacher, the rapport with the class, the adjustments that need to be made depending on the different needs within a class cohort or in different years.”* (C-SAP)

*“We found each other’s **materials** interesting (and useful) but we felt that this was because we share a knowledge base. This knowledge base might be making the materials re-useable for us in a way that might not be for others. So do we have to assume a certain level of knowledge/understanding of the subject matter in the potential re-user? We are not writing texts books, we are merely sharing **teaching ideas**”*(C-SAP)

Here C-SAP partners exchange ideas about the tacit nature of the materials, their delivery and the understanding that may be required by the reader in order to repurpose. As part of their pilot project, they have also developed (in collaboration with the project partners), an interactive ‘toolkit’ to help map and describe their module content for the purposes of releasing as OER. Whilst on one level this is about capturing appropriate metadata to help in the future discoverability of the resource, the toolkit also encourages contributors to reflect on the learning design and implicit pedagogies that are embedded with the delivery and (re)use of the module materials.

*To an extent, ‘trust’ and ‘reliability’ may prove to be as important as ‘diversity of resources’ to the overall success of the project. As such, peer-review is one way to ‘professionalise’ the production of **teaching material** in the way which is not too dissimilar to research peer-review.* (HumBox)

Here HumBox partners consider the role of peer review and overall profile of a lecturer, their research and their teaching and the current values that are placed on each. It is interesting to note how much has been brought into the discourse in and around the topic of ‘teaching materials’. The OER Programme has raised conversations and reflections of this nature, bringing fundamental questions about the relationship between research and teaching to the forefront. Partners who teach, but are not research active have discovered that they can disseminate their materials via Humbox. Indeed those with strong research profiles can also use the Humbox to link to these within systems such as Eprints online research repositories.

Some debates about imbalanced values placed on research and teaching have been brought into the discourse, with arguments that good teaching of a high quality deserves recognition, both within and beyond the HE environment. Within HumBox, review and commenting capabilities are enabled and these facilities allow teaching materials to move from something ‘static’ to knowledge-enhancing, as practice is discussed. The C-SAP toolkit enables reflective learning design that aims to actively encourage reuse by others and to try to avoid the valuable tacit experience being lost.

In this sense, activities within both projects have moved the discourse from looking for solutions to the creation of teaching materials as an *individualised* activity to a much more *dialogical production*, with ‘tools’ that have been created and developed *from the discourse* and that will *enable the discourse* to continue.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

So, has this initial JISC-funded and HEA-led project research into the release of open educational resources helped to reduce the perceived barriers to sharing amongst the academics taking part? Or is further culture change required and what are the prospects for *sustainability*?

This paper has attempted to provide a small glimpse into one of many ways in which, rather than take at face value the 'storefront for OER' we might 'browse a little deeper' into the discourse to consider the range of motivations for OER deposit. Using simple and freely available tools we can quickly collect discussion texts. These can be carefully examined to reveal what is embodied within. More detailed linguistic analysis could reveal much more, as this is just a small study where further comment from readers is warmly invited. It is important that a very 'open' approach is taken to participation and dissemination of 'open' educational resources and that people speak freely about the experience and its potential, but also any concerns and hurdles still to cross. We need to acknowledge the challenges that lie ahead and not miss the 'quieter voices' that are present. As Santos, McAndrew, & Godwin put it:-

"These discourses are what regulate the social practices and the language used to foster desired actions. In this sense, they are very powerful and subtle, because they can be taken for granted if not brought into evidence." (Santos, McAndrew, & Godwin, 2007)

It is important to acknowledge the *whole context* of any of these snippets of the discourse, but in turn, clusters of frequently arising words and phrases can pinpoint that which can be hidden from view, at first glance.

For example, the 'sharing of resources' in dialogue can be seen to change almost imperceptibly to 'marketing of resources' in places. OER provides a vehicle through which institutions can market resources that are clearly 'branded':-

"Sharing quality learning materials in this way can enhance a university's reputation and provide prospective students with a taste of what to expect - a 'shop window' for the university's work." JISC (2010)

This can be seen positively in one sense, but we should also ask, if marketing is a priority, then are we missing out on some real opportunities for the exchange of a more creative dialogue:-

*"I would like to see OER definitions that include discussions on creativity, subjectivity and more theorised, like for example what does 'exchange' mean, in the context of teaching" (C-SAP).*

Santos, McAndrew, & Godwin comment that "OER initiatives can draw strongly on institutional discourses that aim to raise profiles, leaving to a second plan the commitment to offering true possibilities for the knowledge construction" (Santos, McAndrew, & Godwin, 2007)

However, the marketing aspect can also be from a personal, not just institutional point of view:-

*"to introduce the dissemination of teaching materials.....trying to convince research units and researchers that impact can be achieved through dissemination in Humbox...trying to convince HEFCE that OERs are a way of to achieve impact to be recognised in the REF? Or are these efforts in any way incompatible with the community-driven bottom-top approach of Humbox that we all share?" (HumBox)*

What has been interesting from this OER project participation so far, for us in LSS, where Languages and Social Sciences have much to offer each other in 'exchange' of resources for teaching and research has not been the intended 'end result' of the openly shared materials alone. Rather the much wider debates about how we work in HE, with and around the materials, when currently there are many constraints. For us, too, the active participation with both the respective HEA Subject Centre staff who led the projects and subject community colleagues is also valued. Indeed this discourse around OER has raised the wish to *share personal and critical pedagogies*, rather than teaching materials alone, within and between subject communities. Sustaining ways to do this is possibly an important key to ongoing engagement.

With this in mind, it has yet to be established how and where *learners* fit in with the OER drive to share materials, both as users and creators of resources, and it is necessary to raise this in future projects:-

*"I want to use openly accessible resources to encourage students to be 'syllabus independent'"*

(C-SAP)

Within the discourse of OER there is, amongst others, "the discourse of widening participation, the discourse of globalisation, the discourse of social inclusion and the media discourse" (Santos, McAndrew, & Godwin, 2007)

Now too, we can add to this list the discourse of *economic crisis*. Since the 2008 *Online innovation in HE report* in which Prof Sir Ron Cooke outlined the plans for a corpus of high quality openly accessible teaching materials, the economic downturn has swiftly taken hold, and with it, reassessment of priorities for all. The impact that economic factors may have, where OER is concerned, will be interesting. The necessity for smarter working practices in HE and use of online tools to forge collaborations and research opportunities may encourage OER participation. It is important though to retain the values that flow through our teaching. Institutional marketing alone, as a main motivation, would surely cause us to lose something, if this becomes the 'dominant voice'.

The fluidity and movement of discourse means that the OER movement is not only about *open educational resources*, it is about *open educational discourse* too, about how and why we teach the way we teach, and with the materials we use to teach. The HumBox and C-SAP Projects have revealed shared concerns, hopes and aspirations for what OER might bring. We now look forward to the next round of projects that will in turn generate more online discourse and further opportunities for a critical analysis.

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