

Curriculum design for open education – micro course pilot.

Institution & Institutional Context

The University of Tasmania (UTAS) is the only higher education institution (HEI) in the state of Tasmania. It is a regional, multi-campus institution with internationally significant research institutes centred on the Antarctic, agriculture and health. UTAS has undergone a period of significant growth, with over 30 000 students currently enrolled. The university has a tradition of face to face teaching but has recently adopted a blended learning model, where all units have an online presence.

Keywords and OEP themes

International curriculum; Teacher voice, Student voice

What is the case study about?

A cross-institutional project team has designed, developed and evaluated a free, open and online professional development micro-course focussed on supporting curriculum design in higher education. The course aimed to develop the capacity of academics in Australia to adopt and incorporate open educational resources (OER) and open educational practices (OEP) into curriculum development and renewal.

The course was designed for integration as a module into Graduate Certificate of University Learning and Teaching programs, with learning outcomes seen as being nested within broader sets of subject or unit learning outcomes. In the UTAS context, the course will comprise approximately one third of a unit in Assessment and Curriculum Design. The micro-course is also for informal learning to meet just-in-time professional development needs in contemporary curriculum design in a technology enhanced learning (TEL) and teaching context.

What is the issue or need you are addressing?

The initiative responds to an identified gap between awareness of OEP and implementation of OEP, particularly the production, adaptation and use of OER to support the design of innovative, engaging and agile curriculum.

The micro-course models an OEP-based approach to support formal and informal learning, with multiple learning pathways offering learners sequenced or sampling options. A matrix course structure balances and intersects OEP concepts with curriculum design topics, on which individual and group learning activities are based. The activities foreground co-creation and learner generated artefacts that can be used and applied in professional practice. Two major tasks enable learners to demonstrate learning outcomes for accredited, formal learning. The course is also designed for reuse at different scales e.g. whole course, learning pathway or individual activity.

Teaching strategy

Effective teaching strategies needed to deal with the particular issues in Rwanda are the ones that clearly define competencies expected from graduates, recognise and support self-determined open learning practices towards the development of those competencies. Such strategies empower learners as key agents in their own educational transformation and would assist in catalysing open learning practices and assessing learners' competence development via those practices. Of course, these strategies may vary across fields of study, but all of them would share the aspect of learner-led demand basis rather than imposing lectures to learners.

How was the initiative implemented?

A small project team, with representatives from two universities undertook initial scoping and agreed a learning design

underpinned by a set of draft learning outcomes, course principles and values. With guidance from the team, an Educational Developer (project officer) investigated and evaluated open platforms and tools, identified relevant OER for inclusion in the course, and set out a draft outline. Colleagues representative of target learners were canvassed regarding their open course experiences and communication preferences. The project team then developed draft learning pathways and activities, along with the major assessment tasks. The development proceeded in the WikiEducator platform building on UTAS' partnership with the OERu. Prior to the pilot offering, three critical friends reviewed the course and provided feedback. Invitations to participate in the pilot offering were sent to L&T practitioners with TEL-focused roles from UTAS and four other universities.

A reflective writing task was embedded in the course and structured to prompt reflection on several aspects of the project. A thematic analysis of learners' responses, allows for the micro course to be revised. In the spirit of sharing, all learners will be informed how their collective feedback has shaped the next iteration of the course.

Outcomes

The primary outcome of the project was to produce the micro-course and make it available for use and reuse. The feedback from the participants has provided an additional outcome giving a student voice to enable a continual cycle of review and improvement – to the content, design and delivery.

Issues & challenges

The primary challenge was to secure resourcing to work on an initiative that sits outside 'core business'. With a project officer in place the next challenge was to identify a free, open platform for hosting the micro-course, which was conducive to open licensing and reuse. Despite hosting a successful MOOC, UTAS does not yet possess a scalable, institutional capability to host open courses. Furthermore, in-house course development expertise is most invested in the institutional learning management system. Construction of the micro-course using existing OER provided some challenges, particularly around the need to create and adapt resources, rather than rely on reusing existing resources, which were either non-existent, not suitable, or not open.

External funding through the Office for Learning and Teaching was a key enabler for this project. The project team then accepted an offer to host the course with the OERu, based on UTAS' partner status, with a view to the revised micro course becoming an OERu course offering. This necessitated the Educational Designer gaining WikiEducator development skills, which was aided by the WikiEducator resources available and the support of OERu staff.

The necessity to create or adapt resources for use in the micro-course was aided by the employment of an experienced educational developer with expertise in curriculum design. Ready access to advice on licencing and copyright was extremely valuable.

Insights and Recommendations for National and/or Institutional Development

Resources and infrastructure do need to be directed to facilitate a move to open educational practices. Underpinning this need to be supportive policies, and an institution-wide understanding of the purposes of moving in a more open direction. At an individual level capacity building is vitally important, as is recognition of those who are leading their universities in this endeavour.

Review of the current Australian copyright law is clearly a priority as use of OEP increases in the sector. Ensuring university copyright officers have a current knowledge of OEP and open licencing is also emerging as important. If there is to be a national move towards adopting OEP, building capacity of staff through continuing professional development is fundamental.

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