

Book Review: Open Educational Resources: Policy, Costs, and Transformation

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Book Review: Open Educational Resources: Policy, Costs, and Transformation



Editors: Fengchun Miao, Sanjaya Mishra and Rory McGreal (Paris, France: UNESCO, and Burnaby, BC, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning, 2016, 231 pages)

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When I was a child in the 1970s, there was a famous series of children's picture books by the Swedish author Astrid Lindgren and photographer Anna Riwkin-Brick (Kümmerling-Meibauer & Surmatz, 2011). Each book offered a brief glimpse into the life of a child in one country. The books piqued the interest of the reader by presenting each country's unique and even exotic landscapes and traditions, yet I believe that what really struck a chord with those who followed the stories were the inner lives of the children, and their relationships with their siblings, parents, and peers. The lives of the foreign children seemed at once so different from the life of the reader, yet so similar. I was reminded of Lindgren's and Riwkin-Brick's books when I read the different chapters in *Open Educational Resources: Policy, Costs and Transformation*, edited by Miao, Mishra, and McGreal and published under the UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning logos. Each chapter discusses open educational resources (OER) in a different country, and each chapter tells a story that is unique yet so familiar to anyone involved in OER anywhere in the world: developing and licensing good OER, distributing them, and, the biggest challenge of them all, getting teachers and students to adopt the resources.

The book includes 15 chapters, organized alphabetically from Australia to Washington State Community and Technical Colleges System, preceded by an Introduction chapter and followed by a Conclusions chapter, written by the editors. Given the somewhat eclectic nature of 15 chapters organized by alphabetical order, I strongly recommend that readers begin by reading the Introduction *and* the Conclusions chapters, as the latter effectively highlights the three main questions discussed in the various chapters:

1. What are some of the **global trends** in OER development? How are OER policies and initiatives developing and changing in scope to respond to the problems OER have the potential to address?
2. What are some **actual outcomes** of OER policies and initiatives? What have we learned from existing initiatives? What are the reactions from major stakeholders, and what challenges do those stakeholders face?
3. What are the **next steps** for policy-makers to take? What can national education authorities, the private sector, and other partners do to promote OER? (pg. 223, bold added)

The Introduction chapter provides the rationale of the book, as well as a useful overview of each of the chapters. The Conclusions chapter provides a good summary of the main themes of the book, and attempts to provide answers to the three main questions.

The 15 chapters provide a wide and detailed overview of specific OER implementations in various national and multi-national projects. Each case study provides a snapshot of the current state of OER, including details on policy, on costs, and on the potential and actual transformative nature of OER in the country or project. Most chapters describe a specific national or local OER effort in: Australia, The Kingdom of Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, The Caribbean (Antigua & Barbuda), Germany, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Oman, Poland, Russia, and the USA. One chapter describes the OER universitas (OERu) consortium with dozens of member institutions from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle-East, Oceania, and North America. Finally, one chapter resonates with my childhood memories mentioned at the beginning of this review, as it describes the African Storybook Initiative. Its goal is to use OER to break the vicious cycle of low literacy amongst a majority of African children, a literacy level that does not create the market demand that will incentivize the publication of books for these children, which in turn leads to low literacy levels. The project aims to drastically increase the availability of children's books that can be read to and by African children who speak different languages and whose cultural heritages are so diverse.

It is taken for granted that a book like this is freely available online, yet it is important to emphasize the importance of such open publications, and to acknowledge the extensive dedication of resources and efforts that make them possible. Since innovations such as OER are characterized by considerable experimentation and by trial and error, the sharing of experiences, challenges, and solutions is essential to making progress. Anyone involved in OER efforts at the K-12 or academic level will find at least some of the chapters inspiring and instructional, and if this experience can prevent even one significant error, or provide even one critical tip, the effort is worthwhile.

In addition to the individual case studies, this compilation allows the reader to closely inspect a specific topic across the different cases. As someone interested in the role of business models in innovation in general and in innovating with educational technologies in particular (Kalman, 2016), I was able to confirm that most of the OER projects did not pay sufficient attention to their own business model. With the exception of the OERu project, which pays close attention to the project's business model and to its interactions with the business models of its partners and competitors, most other case studies pay too little attention to business models. Some of them describe or discuss the impact of their project on the business models of other players, in particular of publishers of educational materials. Nevertheless, too little attention is given to many of the components of the

business model of the national or regional OER project itself. It appears that giving this aspect of the project more attention could increase the ability of these projects to achieve their goals and to realize the societal and educational potential of OER.

The rich case studies included in this book are a valuable resource for policy makers and practitioners who wish to benchmark similar projects, and to learn from their successes and failures. The book is also a useful new source of real world examples for academics and researchers interested in OER, in educational innovation, and in educational technologies.

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