

Disciplinary and Institutional Perspectives on Open Educational Practice in Art, Design and Media Studies: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper features reflective accounts from teams at two UK universities who are engaged in open education projects supported by national agencies (JISC and the HEA). Art, Design and Media (ADM) studies, by their nature, often feature an emphasis on practical studio and workshop based activities, with a pedagogic culture marked by an emphasis on mentoring, apprenticeship and peer support. In some ways the teaching of ADM subjects can be seen to represent the epitome of the traditional campus ‘walled garden’ and face-to-face model of teaching. In many of these subject areas there can be a shortage of didactic learning and teaching materials, representing a challenge for engagement with open educational practice (the sharing and use of open educational resources) in relation to the production and sharing of open educational resources.

Open Educational practices also present opportunities for higher education teachers in these disciplines. The contingent and provisional nature of knowledge in creative practice disciplines and the high value placed on dialogue, aligns well with the multiple perspectives and approaches afforded by open educational practices. This orientation towards practice can take advantage of the potential for sharing and co-creating skills-based resources. Similarly, those disciplines where consideration of audience for creative cultural production practices is key can also find opportunities. This paper proposes that these characteristics of the disciplinary cultures in ADM subjects provide a good natural fit with open educational practices and that by creating online environments that facilitate the sharing of practice and process lecturers will find the transition to ‘teaching in public’ less formidable.

Drawing on the findings of Practising Open Education, ALTO (Arts Learning and Teaching Online), ALTO UK, and case study examples from two SCORE Fellowships (Support Centre for Open Resources in Education), this paper considers how the broader online ecology generally and open educational practice specifically are impacting on teachers and teaching practices in ADM subjects. Practical examples will be provided to illustrate the points made in the presentation, including emerging findings from a pilot exercise to provide an online collaborative space to support lecturers working in Art, Design and Media (ADM) studies subjects.

Introduction

This paper features reflective accounts from teams at two UK universities who are engaged in open education projects supported by national agencies (JISC and the HEA) in the disciplinary fields of art, design and media. Drawing on the findings of Practising Open Education (Brighton), ALTO (Arts Learning and Teaching Online) and ALTO UK

(University of the Arts London), we first consider the distinct challenges and opportunities for individuals, departments and institutions developing open educational practices (the sharing and use of open educational resources) in the context of ‘creative’ practice-based higher education.

Secondly we reflect on ways that the broader online ecology generally, and open educational practice specifically, are impacting on teachers and teaching practices in these distinct disciplinary areas. This section provides two case study examples from teachers with SCORE Fellowships (Support Centre for Open Resources in Education) from the Open University.

Practising Open Education: Art, design and media - challenges and opportunities

Open educational practices pose distinct challenges for creative disciplines in higher education. Art, Design and Media (ADM) studies, by their nature, often feature an emphasis on practical studio and workshop based activities, with a pedagogic culture marked by an emphasis on mentoring, apprenticeship and peer support. In some ways the teaching of ADM subjects can be seen to represent the epitome of the traditional campus ‘walled garden’ and face-to-face model of teaching. In many of these subject areas there can be a shortage of didactic learning and teaching materials, representing a challenge for engagement with open educational practice in relation to the production and sharing of open educational resources.

Open Educational practices also present opportunities for higher education teachers in these disciplines. The contingent and provisional nature of knowledge in creative practice disciplines and the high value placed on dialogue, aligns well with the multiple perspectives and approaches afforded by open educational practices. This orientation towards practice can take advantage of the potential for sharing and co-creating skills-based resources. Similarly, those disciplines where consideration of audience for creative cultural production practices is key can also find opportunities. This paper proposes that these characteristics of the disciplinary cultures in ADM subjects provide a good natural fit with open educational practices and that by creating online environments that facilitate the sharing of practice and process lecturers will find the transition to ‘teaching in public’ less formidable.

How are developing open educational practices impacting on teachers and teaching practices in ADM subjects? What is the ADM response?

Findings from Practising Open Education (Brighton)

The Practising Open Education project, led by the Art Design Media Subject Centre at the University of Brighton aimed to investigate understandings of open educational resources and practices with six art, design and media departments in UK HE institutions. By directly engaging with teaching and support staff the project sought to encourage the partners in developing appropriate strategies to support open educational practices. In focus group discussions with staff several key themes emerged evidencing burgeoning impacts of open educational practices: upon the changing role of ADM teaching and teachers; the role of studio pedagogies; and the departmental responses to these challenges through activities which centred on: staff development; policy development; and resource and repository development and evaluation.

It is difficult, at this early stage to say how existing ‘open educational resources’, are impacting on teaching in art, design and media. The development of more ‘open’ ways of working is burgeoning and shifts in teaching practice are related to a broader online ecology

and a glut of online digital resources that may or may conform to standard definitions of open educational resources, and may or may not be appropriately licensed. For the art, design and media colleagues we spoke to, the in-house virtual learning environment still holds sway. However, the development and use of digital resources and tools moving towards openness are having significant impact on teaching practices and teachers in this disciplinary field. Three notable aspects are considered below:

1 Reorienting the teaching role

For many tutors the proliferation of online material and sharing tools necessitates a fundamental shift in thinking about the role of the lecturer/ tutor, and move into the role of ‘facilitator’ or ‘guide’. Part of this role is about assisting learners (and developing their own skills) in navigating and evaluating resources critically and effectively.

“It’s changing the role of the teacher... we need to put students into the self-learning mode ... we [teaching staff] need to put in the educational context.”

Online sharing tools such as blogs are perceived as effective instruments to support group work and peer-to-peer learning. They are seen as of particular value in disciplines where assessment often aligns with process rather than outcomes and are utilised as a means for students and staff to chart processes and reflect on progress.

"Blogs are the new ‘sketchbook’ – more collaborative and promote group work.”

2 Supporting students’ skills development

The ability to develop and share teaching and learning materials within institutional VLEs, on institutional webpages, occasionally in open institutional repositories, or on platforms such as YouTube, VIMEO, Slideshare and i-Tunes U, is having the most impact in the area of skills development. Worksheets and multimedia instructional tutorials are being developed to support the teaching and learning of practical skills and techniques in areas where (as everywhere) there are limits to the provision of technical support.

"In digital animation there is a lack of technical support so we have videos to show technique – this is growing resource [with] more being made.”

There is also acknowledgement, and significant use, of existing public resources to support skills acquisition that can be accessed from platforms such as YouTube, Flickr, and TED. Linking to these existing materials via institutional VLEs is fairly common practice. The development and use of resources to support skills learning are both considered time-saving measures that enable the provision of more support, including additional support for students with access and time difficulties and for whom English may be a second language, for less resource:

“Don’t want to waste time reinventing the wheel – I collect hits [resources] and upload to Moodle – ‘more for less’”

3 Enhancing teaching practice

Moves towards more open ways of working are impacting on teachers and their professional development as they utilise existing resources as a benchmark for the development of their own resources and as a basis for ‘embellished’ or ‘improved’ versions.

“I use to compare my teaching, to ensure I’m on track.”

Many staff perceive the sharing of teaching resources as a basis for collaboration with students and with colleagues at a departmental, cross-departmental and inter-institutional level. We heard examples of the collaborative development of resources across institutions and suggestions that such peer sharing holds the potential to raise pedagogic standards in art, design and media subjects.

“They can open up channels ... provide the potential to collaborate.”

This relates to the established practice of identifying, building on, or improving existing online resources produced by academics in other institutions and some academics see this as aligned to the creative practices that are at the core of art, design and media higher education:

“It’s fun to find resources have been used and remixed ... it’s fun to build on the work of others, it’s a creative activity.”

More ‘open’ ways of working also hold profile-raising possibilities for individual staff. We heard examples of teacher-design practitioners using their personal websites to host their teaching resources, reporting benefits in attribution and finding their employer institution linking to their online professional profiles. These profile-raising possibilities extend, of course, to the department and institution and there are many examples of institutions developing and sharing resources (for example, interviews with staff and alumni), to inform prospective applicants of course and teaching provision.

Disciplinary Considerations – Studio Pedagogies

As anticipated the discussions through the project with art, design and media teaching staff elicited a range of topics common to all disciplines: concerns over workload; ownership of intellectual property and copyright infringement; quality assurance and critical engagement with OERs. However participants also indicated that the development of open educational teaching practices offered an opportunity to align traditional subject discipline characteristics with evolving online digital pedagogies. And in consideration of skills-based teaching in ADM subjects, as detailed earlier, the use of widely available resources was highly effective.

Art and design higher education is distinctive in its studio-centred pedagogies, which for some appeared to be in conflict with the use of OERs, but for others a natural progression towards the collaborative characteristics of open educational practices. The inclination for both ADM staff and students to exhibit, share, network and develop communities were characteristic features of open educational practice. The visibility afforded by the creation and use of online materials offered an opportunity not only to profile staff and student work but in addition reinforced departmental identity

There was acknowledgement of the alignment between “studio and online motivations”; in an art, design and media context, students have professional motivations to make their work available to audiences external to the university. Referencing Professor Henry Jenkins (MIT), one participant suggested that online technologies can further the collaborative nature of studio cultures (<http://web.mit.edu/cms/People/henry3/>)

“Motivations in studio and online for Art & Design students are the same.”

The traditional ‘studio’ environment and practices are presented, by some participants, as ideal conditions for collaborative working and interaction in art and design education. However it was recognised that open educational practice is perceived as challenging this way of working and, implicitly, as related to individualistic approaches to learning characterised by the subject disciplines’ inherent drive to create and show their work. The challenge being to shape open educational practice to studio pedagogies.

“[We are] able to investigate suitability of OERs to studio- based courses – OERs should enhance Studio Pedagogy by focusing on the development of creative attributes.”

Departmental Responses

The project provided each of the partners the opportunity to develop ‘actions’ in response to discussions identifying department-specific strategies to support the wider take-up of open educational practices. These strategies could be loosely collated under the themes: (i) staff development; (ii) policy development; and (iii) resource and repository development and evaluation.

(i) Staff development

As a consequence of their involvement in the project all the partners developed strategies that encouraged greater staff and student awareness and engagement with open practices and OERs. There was an acknowledgement that the key driver was cultural change and offered opportunities for staff to showcase research, resource development and areas of IT support. All the partners outlined ‘actions’ provided staff support and CPD incorporating further focus groups, case studies, workshops, departmental presentations, IP, use of open licenses and copyright guidance, and repository good practice guidance. Examples ranged from: ‘How to’ guides including ‘Enhanced Learning Through Technology’; Workshops including linking Blackboard 9 with EdShare [Repository], Copyright, Intellectual Property guidance and Use of Creative Commons licenses; and Departmental Presentations showing the benefits of OERs.

(ii) Policy development

As the project aimed to ‘seed’ open educational practices within the participating departments it was expected that this would encourage greater dialogue without directly impacting on immediate policy development. However, progress was made as the partner institutions encouraged staff to identify other means of support; SCORE Fellowships and JISC funding proposals for example. There was support for embedding the use of OERs in teaching, learning and assessment strategies and in one institution there was recognition of the need to move toward the wider use of Creative Commons licenses, “to begin to adapt current regulations to allow this in future to enhance our ability to produce OERs”.

(iii) Resource and repository development and evaluation

All of the project partners identified the need to align staff support and CPD with long-term rigorous resource evaluation, repository development and IT engagement. The strategies presented by the partners ranged from: website development; usability testing; resource rating systems; resource creation and e-portfolio guidance. More programme-specific actions included the development of OERs for PGT Research Methods Module: ‘Research Methods for Art and Design students’; the development of a series of lectures/demonstrations, using Camtasia screen capture software, aimed at accessibility and students with Asperger’s Syndrome and capturing workshop techniques and demonstrations used in industry for a fashion course.

Findings from ALTO and ALTO-UK (University of the Arts London)

ALTO

To begin with, and in accordance with the existing technological hegemony in education in the UK, the ALTO project (Arts Learning and Teaching Online) initially started out by committing to acquire and install a specialist repository software package. Repository software is optimized for storage and management and operates using a library paradigm, but is not good at presenting or publishing information. These limitations rapidly became apparent in the context of ALTO and the Art and Design academic community, who traditionally place a high importance on ‘look and feel’ i.e. affective and usability issues.

We realized that while a repository might be a solution for meeting institutional storage requirements, it alone would not be enough for open education development. We came to understand that ALTO needed to be more than just one software tool – it would need to be a system of connected and related tools. A repository gave us a place to safely and reliably store resources in the long-term for which there was already a strong institutional need. We came to see that the ALTO repository needed to fit into and be a part of a wider and dynamic ‘ecosystem’ for creating open online resources and supporting their associated communities of practice. Two things became clear. First, was that resources in the repository would need to be easily ‘surfaced’, in a variety of social media to aid dissemination and impact. Second, that the other components of such a UAL ecosystem would want to use the repository to deposit some of their outputs now that the a long term storage service was possible.

Fortunately, a communal social media platform was already available through an existing UAL initiative called Process.Arts (<http://process.arts.ac.uk>):

“an open online resource showing day-to-day arts practice of staff and students at UAL”
(Follows, 2011).

This originated as a small personal research project to explore how to meet the need for staff and students to show and discuss aspects of their practice as artists and designers by providing a collaborative space using the Drupal web content management system, which includes many common Web 2.0 features. The ALTO project decided to support this initiative and it has since been very successful in a short time, with users uploading images and videos and discussing each other’s work. User numbers and interactions are high and growing with considerable interest from abroad.

Through this experience, we came to understand that if the repository were to be the officially branded ‘library’ part of ALTO then Process.Arts would provide the ‘open studio and workshop’ where knowledge and resources are created and shared. As a result, the project board took a decision to redesign the initial architecture of ALTO to add a ‘social layer’ to the initial repository, which incorporated Process.Arts. As at 2012, the evolving institutional infrastructure can be viewed at this web site <http://alto.arts.ac.uk/>. The digital library component can be viewed at this web site <http://alto.arts.ac.uk/filestore/>, and the social layer which provides an open collaborative studio/workshop space can be viewed at this web site <http://process.arts.ac.uk/>.

The ALTO project was aimed at developing the University of the Arts London (UAL) engagement with OER creation and sharing, the project was implemented in 2010 – 11 during a tumultuous and uncertain time in the UK HE sector, with large funding cuts for

institutions like UAL specialising in arts and humanities. The financial strain and anticipated further changes to our provision meant some staff were, understandably, reluctant to engage in discussion regarding OER creation and reuse. Despite this, interest has remained high and many have engaged, agreeing to create and share their resources. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues, as expected, were an important part of the project and the ALTO team worked with the UAL legal department to get the use of Creative Commons licences officially accepted, institutional policy in this area is also being revised as a result.

An important early output was a clear and short set of ‘statements of principle’ that provide a rationale for the ALTO project and outline why people should be involved¹. As the project progressed it became clear that there was a considerable amount of demand from UAL staff for an easy means to showcase their work, which could be leveraged into OER engagement. It also became clear that the UAL in common with most other UK art and design institutions did not have an officially supported web channel to allow ‘self publishing’ of this kind.

Engagement with OER can be a powerful driver for learning and development, as the process of resource creation requires reflection on ones own teaching and professional practice. When done by many individuals across a department, college or university this can lead to broader cultural change. In addition, as has been evident in other institutions aggressively undertaking OER creation, collaboration and sharing with the external world can break down internal barriers by making them seem insignificant in the context opening up ones practice to the world (Lane et al, 2009). A central ‘official’ place to share and store OERs like ALTO can also give an institutional endorsement to this cultural change.

A key finding of the project was the successful use of ‘fieldworkers’ (the use of college coordinators) to provide a direct link to front line teachers for the UAL project parent body (Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design - CLTAD). This project allowed us to explicitly design and fund this approach to support OER release. The project manager and coordinators spent a majority of their time working with individuals and groups on the ground to help them share and reflect on their resources and practice (especially in the context of collaborative learning design). This has a lot in common with ethnographical approaches to successful socio-technical systems development as advocated by Edith Mumford (1995) and Ettiene Wenger (1998 & 2009). The ALTO team are providing valuable insights from their ‘fieldwork’ giving CLTAD timely and relevant information regarding practices undertaken and conditions encountered by front line teaching staff. This combination of an OER repository and online open workshop/studio/seminar system with attached ‘fieldworkers’ collaborating with front line teachers while also working with a central educational development unit could provide a model for an economically sustainable means of enhancing educational provision in HE in a time of austerity.

ALTO UK

The ALTO UK (<http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/alto/alto-uk/>) project was a follow-on project that sought to apply the lessons learnt from the initial ALTO project to a group of art and design institutions. ALTO-UK also included a small pilot exercise to open up the UAL Process.Arts social media platform for use by the project partners. This pilot exercise was also intended to explore a possible solution to the needs in the UK Art and Design HE community for an easy mechanism to publish content to the open web. This need has been driven by the desire for a platform for academic and professional promotion and networking, the online organisation

¹ <http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/alto/about/>

and public showing of student projects and the projection of the distinctive culture of art and design studies. Many institutional infrastructures and service departments cannot meet this need for an easy online publishing platform. This is resulting in staff often using external web hosting providers, web design companies, and Web 2.0 services; causing waste, duplication, extra costs and lost opportunities for the sector.

The ALTO UK project aimed to target this service vacuum by providing a prototype of an on-demand easy to use web-publishing platform and social networking tool for staff and students. This same platform provides opportunities for users to release their resources as OERs with Creative Commons licenses, significantly lowering the threshold to engaging with OER creation, sharing, collaboration and reuse – critical for long term sustainability². The pilot service is also linked to the national UK learning resource repository service, Jorum³ to encourage users to think longer-term by depositing in the national learning resource repository and will expose them to the resources available in Jorum for possible repurposing and reuse. Longer-term the ALTO UK proposal and concept has the potential to provide a ‘shared services’ approach that is aligned with current policy priorities⁴ and helps to meet some pressing unmet needs.

SCORE Fellowship Case Studies

The following two case studies are presented here in an abbreviated form, as they are both featured in a separate conference presentation appearing in the proceedings under the title of; *Exploring OER rich media reuse through social media content communities*.

Case study example 1 - SCORE Fellowship project details (Sarah Atkinson)

Sarah’s work into film and audiovisual media open archives as OER includes an in-depth case study into SP-ARK (<http://www.sp-ark.org/>).

The SP-ARK archive provides a unique example of the successful marriage between the principles of open educational resources and open archives. SP-ARK is an interactive online project based on the multi-media archive of filmmaker Sally Potter. Over the past five years, the archive has been developed to a Beta-testing level, and includes the intuitive visual navigation of one of Potter’s films, *Orlando* (1992), and all of the related assets. All of the resources have been digitised and meta-data has been added relating to the items description and association with other assets. The copyright to all of the materials belongs to *Adventure Pictures*, and they have chosen to allow access and use of the materials via a Creative Commons licensing model. Users are able to view clips from the film as well as a myriad of associated materials including the scripts, storyboards, still images, location and developmental paperwork, using the intuitive visual browsing interface. Users are then able to build their own unique ‘pathway’ through the archive’s content as they explore a particular theme or process; they are able to save items that they have viewed. Each item in their pathway can be annotated with comments, observations and streams of thought. Other users are then able to access each other’s pathways and to link to them within this further level of user-led archival exploration. This type of interaction has the potential to foster a deeper engagement with the materials, encourages the sharing of ideas and practices, and creates a user-community around the archive’s content.

² The ALTO UK platform also meets several of the JISC OER Phase 1 aspirations set out in the ‘Leeds Manifesto’, notably for more usable tools for dissemination see <http://www8.open.ac.uk/score/oer-and-sustainability-leeds-manifesto-draft>

³ <http://www.jorum.ac.uk/>

⁴ For example see [Collaborate to compete: Seizing the opportunity of online learning for UK higher education](#)

The archive has the potential to support and inform the approaches of emerging online film-based repositories as they grapple with the issues of openness, reuse and licensing. The project ultimately provides an innovative example of a higher education institution and archive collaboration in action, which could in turn provide a compelling model for the development of a type of open academic practice in the future.

Case study example 2 - SCORE Fellowship project details (Chris Follows)

This case study describes Chris's work in developing Process.Arts from a small personal research project into a growing community of practice and how the UAL aims to develop a sustainable approach to open educational practice through the agile development of existing open/social educational media content and associated communities. A summary of UAL's experience of developing the social media platform Process.Arts (<http://process.arts.ac.uk/>) is provided as well as investigating its potential integration with the wider arts sector and open education movement through SCORE fellowship research, ALTO UK and the DIAL project (digital Integration into arts learning) part of the JISC UK Developing digital literacies programme.

Institutional VLE's and OER repositories are rarely built to support social media content communities, as a result many learning and teaching materials are being independently dispersed across the web using more familiar and user friendly 'social media' environments such as wikis, blogs, independent websites, YouTube accounts etc. There is currently no middle ground to facilitate OER content communities. A question to address is how can OER communities adopt social media tools and practices to help improve and encourage better rich media OER practice? Key challenges for the rich media reuse community are finding or being directed to the most useful and usable open content. Random Google searches will sometimes get you what you want but the content will be more than likely high risk and non-reusable in an OER sense. Finding OER rich media reusable 'gems' in such a granular landscape is difficult and random standalone pieces of media content can be difficult to assess in regards to reuse, remixing this content even more so. How do we share and collaborate in this space and overcome the obstacles of use and re-use specifically when creating and designing complex rich media learning content? The presentation draw on four different perspectives of developing media content communities within practice based art and design subjects including the original Process.Arts development, SCORE research, ALTO UK (JISC UK OER programme), <http://process.arts.ac.uk> and the DIAL project (Digital Integration into Arts Learning) <http://dial.myblog.arts.ac.uk/> part of the JISC UK Developing digital literacies programme.

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