



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organisation
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pour l'éducation,
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للترقية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Open Content

Open content: Towards equal learning opportunities?

The number of open collaborative technologies has exploded over the last years. What impact have they had on access to and quality of education worldwide? Can developing countries afford these expensive technologies and thus avoid remaining on the sidelines of the digital revolution? What about copyright issues? What role for UNESCO?

In the last five years we have been witnessing a second wave of Internet-enabled forms of mass collaboration and new types of communities which are bringing unprecedented changes in the structure and *modus operandi* of 21st century societies. In *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, Don Tapscott, a visionary Web analyst, advocates the four pillars underlying these new forms of mass collaboration: *openness, peering, sharing and acting globally*.

The latest and most promising applications and tools are defined as "Web 2.0": strictly Web-based, they are open/free, support collaboration, interactivity and are responsive to the user/learner.

'Open content': examples from international practice

The term 'open content', coined by analogy with 'open source', describes any kind of creative work (including articles, pictures, audio) or engineering work (open machine design) that is published in a format that explicitly allows the copying and the modifying of the information by anyone. This definition is to be found in *Wikipedia*, the world's best known example of an open content project. Launched in 2001, it is the largest general reference work currently available on the Internet. As of November 2007, *Wikipedia* had approximately 9.1 million articles in 252 languages. *Wikipedia* was the first Web 2.0 service, followed by *YouTube* (a video sharing website hosting over 6 million videos) and *MySpace* (a social networking website with over 200 million accounts).

Open content and learning

Blogs (audio- and video-), wikis, instant messaging, podcasts, virtual communities of practice, virtual learning

worlds have increasingly entered the world of education and have even known some degree of success when they are implemented with appropriate pedagogy and instructional problems in mind, and address specific learner needs.

How can the potential of these emerging technologies and tools be harnessed to ensure access to quality education for everyone? There are still formidable challenges on a global scale: the recently published 2008 EFA Global Monitoring Report entitled *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?* – points out that, "although now over 1 billion people have access to the Internet, the latter still remains inaccessible to most children, youth and adults in the countries that are struggling the most to achieve EFA."

There are several notable examples of projects concerning collaborative content creation, sharing and redistribution. The most prominent one is

OpenCourseWare led by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the field of higher education, followed by other high-quality open content initiatives, funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, such as The OpenLearn initiative of the UK Open University, which makes educational resources freely available on the Internet with state-of-the art support and collaboration tools to connect learners and educators; The OpenContent Initiative, which is a school district project to build standards-based open content curriculum; as well as this year's UNESCO-King Hamad prize-winning projects: *Claroline*, *Curriki*, *Sésamath* and *Enciclomedia* (see table on p. 2), which are designed to provide open access to quality teaching and learning resources in innovative collaborative and sustainable ways.



2007 UNESCO King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize for the Use of ICTs in Education

Laureates

Claroline (represented by the Université Catholique de Louvain and Haute Ecole Léonard de Vinci, Belgium) provides an open-source platform reaching 900 institutions in 84 countries, extending services in 35 languages. It represents a generative model of a global network and community comprised of learners, teachers and developers, in which new tools and functionalities are continuously added from participating schools and institutions around the world.

Curriki: The Global Education and Learning Community (USA) is a comprehensive internet portal, tool set and user service designed to develop, aggregate, evaluate and support the best open source curricula, catering for the requirements of all age groups and all learning interests. Curriki's 5,000 learning objects in many languages are used regularly by 30,000 people.

Honourable mentions

Sésamath (France) is a comprehensive freely available mathematics curriculum, developed by a community of experts, instructional designers and almost 300 math teachers.

Enciclomedia (Mexico) is a basic easy-to-use platform installed in 145,000 classrooms in state primary schools in Mexico, including the most remote and poor areas, as well as in 13 other Latin American countries.

UNESCO and the Open Educational Resources movement

UNESCO is committed to promoting open access to quality education for all both as a basic human right and as a key driver to sustainable development. Committed to the principle that knowledge is a public good accessible to everyone, the Organization supports the use of information and communication technologies as enablers of new forms of knowledge creation and sharing. The term 'open educational resources' was first adopted at UNESCO's 2002 Forum on the "Impact of Open CourseWare for Higher Education in Developing Countries", also funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. UNESCO has since been an active supporter of the open provision of high-quality educational resources for consultation, adaptation and use by wide communities of teachers, learners or researchers at global scale.

Although not a direct developer of open educational resources and open networks, UNESCO has made noteworthy contributions to the international open access movement, such as the UNESCO-powered *Open Educational Resources Discussion Forum*, an excellent laboratory for sharing and disseminating innovative creative ideas and approaches related to the use of ICTs in higher education, and the *UNESCO Open Training Platform*, a hub to free and open learning resources for development fed by development stakeholders including UN agencies worldwide.

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Narrowing the education divide: what role for UNESCO?

The 2008 EFA Global Monitoring Report states that "as education systems expand, however, they face more complex and more specific challenges. They must address the increasing number and diversity of student populations by ensuring that all children and youth, regardless of their backgrounds, gain access to a quality education." This is a huge challenge facing the international community.

To succeed in its mission to assist Member States to develop policies, capacities and tools for quality education for all, lifelong learning and sustainable development, UNESCO has to champion free and open access to education for every citizen, promote global collaboration in the development of innovative educational materials and services, and create fertile ground for the sharing and dissemination of good practice, knowledge, and resources as part of a worldwide effort to make education accessible, affordable, inclusive and more effective.

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To find out more

2007 UNESCO King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize for the Use of ICTs in Education
http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=54380&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Claroline Consortium (www.claroline.net)

Curriki – The Global Education & Learning Community (<http://www.curriki.org>)

Sésamath Association (www.sesamath.net)

Enciclomedia Program
(www.enciclomedia.edu.mx)