

A decorative graphic consisting of three blue circles of varying sizes and several thin blue lines. One large circle is at the top right, a medium one is in the center, and another large one is at the bottom right. Lines connect the top-left and top-right circles to the center circle, and a line connects the top-right circle to the bottom-right circle.

What constitutes good open educational practices?

The Open Educational Quality Initiative

Official list of elements for open educational practices published by
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OPAL

OPEN EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INITIATIVE

The "Open Educational Quality Initiative" (OPAL) is an international network to promote innovation and better quality in education and training through the use of open educational resources. It is partly funded by the European Commission. OPAL is initiated through international organizations like UNESCO, ICDE and EFQUEL and a number of Universities like the Open University UK, the Aalto University in Finland, University Duisburg-Essen and the Catholic University in Lisbon, Portugal. It aims at establishing a forum which works to build greater trust in using and promoting open educational resources. The Open Educational Quality Initiative will focus on provision of innovative open educational practices and promote quality, innovation and transparency in higher and adult education. The focus of the OPAL Initiative moves beyond access to open educational resources (OER) to focus on innovation and quality through open educational practices (OEP).

The OPAL Initiating Organizations

The Initiative includes the following organizations:



University Duisburg-Essen (Germany)



Aalto University (Finland)



The Open University (UK)



European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning (Belgium)



Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Portugal)



International Council for Open and Distance Education –
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Dimensions of Open Educational Practices

Many current OER initiatives focus overwhelmingly on access and availability of Open Educational Resources (OER) and not enough on helping individuals and organizations to develop Open Educational Practices (OEP) (Ehlers 2011). In short, open educational practices constitute the adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) within open learning architectures. The creation, use, and re-use of open educational resources, as well as the exploitation of open learning architectures can be challenging for learners and educators, but also for leaders of educational institutions. Policy makers, as well, often need to be made aware of and understand both concepts, and can play a strategic role in fostering rapid uptake of OER and enabling timely adoption of OEP. The Open Educational Quality Initiative (OPAL) after considerable research, consultation and debate proposes the dimensions for open educational practices described below. They form the basis for successful learning with OER.

Area 1: Use of OER and Open Learning Architectures

1. Extent of using and repurposing OER: Finding and using OER is often the first step towards open educational practices. To integrate an OER into one's own teaching/ learning concept is called repurposing. It often involves dismantling the original resource and taking out what is useful while leaving aside the unnecessary. A guide for how to do this can be found here: ...

2. Availability of a process for OER creation: In order for an organization to progress towards open educational practices it is important to define a process whereby educational resources are made available under free license schemes to become open educational resources. Only then will these resources be available for others to use and/ or repurpose –internally as well as externally. A comprehensive organization-wide process for open educational resources boosts progress towards open educational practices.

3. Degree of sharing of OER and OEP: From research we know that the most successful use of open educational resources is where this is a sharing process. The openness required for sharing educational resources is hence a key success factor for open educational practices. In addition to a culture of sharing among practitioners and management, tools for sharing resources and experience within the organization and with actors from other organizations must exist. It is as important to share resources as it is to share the experiences of what works and what does not within open learning architectures. Social network tools therefore play an essential role in any OEP strategy.

4. Extent of working with open learning architectures: Open learning architectures are an important element in OEP. Open learning architectures aim to help learners to become autonomous and act in self-organized learning environments in which they can share, use and /or produce educational resources. A definition and explanation of open learning architectures can be found here:

Area 2: Vision of Openness and a Strategy for OEP in an Organization

1. Organizational vision for OEP: A vision, expressed in written strategy or guidelines is essential. A vision for open educational practices would include reference to the production, sharing, use and/ or reuse of OERs. It would also aim to provide learning opportunities in open learning architectures, in which the aims and objectives of learning as well as learning methodologies are developed in consultation with learners. Such a vision should be communicated and shared within the organization by all stakeholders.

2. Existing OEP strategies and policies: Research shows that strategies and policies are most effective in stimulating OEP across organizations in an effective way. They embody rules and regulations for how to implement OEP across a whole organization. Elements relating to OEP can be either a part of an organization's strategy, e.g. for the development of learning environments, or can even be subject to their own strategy or policy. Policy makers implement OER policy through key white papers, via inclusion in strategy documents, through funding calls or through acting as a front to promote OER initiatives.

3. Business model related to OEP: An ongoing critical discourse against the Open Educational Resources movement is the issue of how it can be made sustainable in the longer term, and what business models might be appropriate. Downes (Downes 2007) provides a useful categorization of funding models for open source type initiatives: Endowment models (where the project obtains base funding), membership models (where a coalition is invited to contribute a sum), donations models (where requests are made for donations), conversion models (where initial freely made material ultimately leads to some element of paying consumer), contributor-pay models (where the contributor pays for the cost of maintaining the contribution and the provide makes it freely available), sponsorship models (such as commercial advertising), institutional models (where the institution assumes responsibility for the initiative), Government models (direct funding via Government agencies), partnerships or exchanges (where the focus is on exchanging resources).

4. Partnerships related to OEP: Partnerships help organizations to develop OEP through the sharing of experiences, benchmarking of policies and strategies and resource development. Some OEP initiatives involve more than one organization and a number of partnership models have emerged. In some cases these include different types of institution (universities, technical universities, colleges); in other cases they focus on specialist areas, each led by a senior academic in that field. Partnership models range from organizations which involve partners, who jointly develop and operate learning content for academic education with interdisciplinary institutions, different types of institutions (universities, technical universities, colleges), and some are also multilingual.

5. Perceived relevance for OEP: For OEP to achieve circulation within a given context it is important that learners, professionals and management perceive OEP as relevant. This can be supported through strategies and policies and also through measures to raise acceptance and understanding for OEP. An important factor often proves to be the degree to which OEP successes are communicable to others.

Step 3: Implementing and Promoting OEP to Transform Learning

1. IPR and Copyright regulations: One of the main focuses of OER lies in sharing, using and adapting resources. Copyright restrictions would negate the whole model. The four main legal issues associated with creating and making OER are copyright issues, ownership, intellectual property rights and permission for use. Many resources may be context-bound due to copyright issues in such a way that it is not possible to adapt the source to local prerequisites. Without the permission of the copyright holder it is strictly prohibited to copy, reproduce or change resources.

2. Motivational framework for OEP: In order to use OER and turn towards the implementation of open learning architectures, the level of motivation from educational professionals and learners has to be high. Some social or cultural barriers are known: academics may be skeptical to the value of investing in the creation of OER, or they may lack the necessary skills (either technical or pedagogical) to create or use OER. Cultural obstacles may exist in terms of sharing or using resources developed by other teachers or institutions, and there are usually no systems to reward academics for engaging with OER initiatives. Studies also show that academics may sometimes be apprehensive about taking part in such initiatives, feeling a loss of control and ownership over their teaching materials and concerns about possible misuse of any OER they produce. Achieving staff-buy in and support, and making it relevant to them are key issues at this level.

3. OEP usage: This dimension describes the degree to which open educational practices are embedded as a reality in the organization's teaching, learning, and other everyday processes.

4. Tools to support sharing and exchange of OEP: Every organization wanting to make progress in the field of OEP needs to adopt a series of tools which can be used for finding, sharing, and repurposing resources, as well as tools like social networks to share experiences and good practices. The emergence of the Creative Commons license was a major breakthrough in terms of providing a means for sharing resources openly and freely.

5. Quality concepts for OEP: Quality concepts for OEP often depend on the type of institution and their learning and teaching culture, the balance of importance of the 'value' of teaching (in comparison to research activities in the institution), the degree to which OEP activities are seen as activities in their own right, the level of digital maturity of the institution and the extent to which they had engaged with OEP work previously. QA models range from lightweight, user-defined models to strictly controlled hierarchical models.

6. Level of knowledge and skills: It is important to overcome educational professionals' initial concerns about OEP and to help with skills development and support. These include: mechanisms to foster and support community engagement, provision of case studies of good practice, running of parallel events and workshops, and provision of specific training materials. It can also comprise marketing materials, guidelines and tutorials on OER, an open textbook adoption worksheet, OER needs assessment surveys, policies and models.

7. Digital literacy: Digital literacy is especially important for the implementation of OEP as it deals with digital resources and practices. Digital literacy is often understood in a purely functional way where it is conceptualized as a person's ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment. However, conceptualizations that focus more on the broader cognitive skills involved are emerging, like the understanding that digital literacy is a special kind of mindset that enables users to perform intuitively in digital environments, and to easily and effectively access the wide range of knowledge embedded in these environments. Sometimes also critical thinking rather than technical competence is identified as the core skill of digital literacy.

8. Support mechanisms for OEP: Support for the development of OEP includes technical support for development, use and re-use as well as re-purposing of OERs, and training in order to equip teachers with the skills to design open learning environments and/or help learners to become autonomous learners.