

## Foreword

My first contact with what would later be named Open Educational Resources (OER) was in 1998 when a young member of my staff in the US Department of Education came to me to discuss a possible project using content in the public domain. The project idea was entered into a federal government wide competition and Kirk Winter would win and launch a site that still exists called Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE at [www.free.ed.gov](http://www.free.ed.gov)), Like MERLOT at [www.merlot.org](http://www.merlot.org), a site started around the same time by the California State University system, FREE contained pointers to open educational resources.

I left Stanford to work at the Hewlett Foundation on January 1, 2001 knowing that I wanted to explore using technology to improve educational opportunities. In early February of that year, then President of MIT, Charles Vest, came into my office with an offer that I couldn't refuse. The offer was to co-fund, with the Mellon Foundation, the development costs for MIT's OpenCourseWare for all of its 2000 courses. After due diligence and clearing it with the Hewlett President, Paul Brest, I took the MIT multi-million dollar proposal to the April 2001 board meeting for final approval. I was two to three minutes into my presentation when I was interrupted by the Board Chairman, Walter Hewlett, who exclaimed, "Mike, I got it! I did the same thing with my music collection (put it on the Web for free for others to use)." The board approved the project.

It did not take long for the idea to sink in that what MIT had proposed was potentially revolutionary and that there were many other institutions and individuals that might have the same instincts about the importance of sharing knowledge. I had enlisted Catherine Casserly, now CEO of Creative Commons, to join Hewlett as a consultant and together we supported major projects in the first two years including the Harvard Library Open Collections, Carnegie Mellon OLI, Creative Commons, and Connexions at Rice. We also visited Sir John Daniel, then Assistant Director for Education at UNESCO and now President of the Commonwealth of Learning, and on his recommendation made the first of many visits to a future grantee, the Open University of the United Kingdom.

In a Hewlett funded meeting at UNESCO in the fall of 2002 the label Open Educational Resources was born, a symbolically important event because it signaled the importance of the emerging movement for the developing as well as the developed world. In that meeting it became clear that the path of content was not only North to South – it ran in both directions. There were and are rich educational resources being created throughout the world. The developing and developed nations can learn from each other.

Other grants followed to support the spread of OCW, including some small wonderful projects in the content areas, projects in Africa, at OECD, WGBH, in China, and in our neighborhood at the Monterey Institute for Technology in Education and at Foothill Community College. By the middle of the decade the term OER had caught, on and there flowered thousands of activities of which we were totally unaware.

The power of OER to make available knowledge hitherto hidden behind passwords and stashed in intranets now available for free access and use by all people all over the world certainly is a worthy goal. But it didn't take long to realize that it wasn't the only positive contribution of OER. The licenses on OER grant the rights to a user to alter content and for combining it with other open content to make something new. This enables OER to reach greater audiences, through translation for example. It also provides the opportunity for the user to become a creator or co-creator and to adapt or otherwise change the original content to meet the local context.

The chapters in this book provide a bridge between these basic understandings of the usefulness of OER and the capacities for use that are enhanced by Web2.0 applications. OER and Web2.0 applications complement each other, something like a marriage where each member is enhanced. The advent of Web2.0 in the late part of the first decade of the millennium opened wide the opportunities for new ways of collaboration, peer support, communities of practice and crowd sourcing in the development and use of OER. Open collaborative learning and development through networks, games, and social media build on a huge literature that links collective interaction to engagement and learning. The creation of a generation of co-creators, for example, greatly enhances the chance for open development networks focused on continuous improvement and innovation to arise just as they arose stimulated by open source software.

An impressive array of chapter authors use case studies and analyses to dig deeply into understanding how to effectively support learners and other users as they engage in individual and collaborative development and learning using OER. The study group taking place on Facebook, teachers in rural areas around the world working together on common lessons using their mobile phones, learners at home using OER to become better at their jobs while being supported by others learning from the same materials, and teachers and professors from multiple sites collectively improving the quality of teaching materials, will all be commonplace activities in the near future. This book provides a powerful introduction into how ideas and activities such as these and more are changing the way that we think about schooling and learning.

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**Marshall S. Smith** (Mike) served as a senior advisor to Arne Duncan and the Director of the International Affairs at the U. S. Department of Education from January 2009 to June 2010. Prior to that, Mr. Smith directed the Education Program at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation from 2001 to 2009, where he focused on improving student achievement, reforming California's education system, and initiating and sustaining Open Education Resources to provide world wide access for all to quality educational materials. He served in the Clinton Administration as the Under Secretary of the U. S. Department of Education from 1993 to 2000. Prior to his appointment as Under Secretary, he served as a professor of education and Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University. Previously, he served as an Associate Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education and a professor at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he also served as the Director of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. He is a member of the National Academy of Education.