Chapter 12
Open-Sourced Personal, Networked Learning and Higher Education Credentials

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ABSTRACT

Much has been made about the “disruption” afforded by open learning to higher education. While it is the case that open learning offers opportunities for free content and courses within university studies, self-determined student-generated learning has yet to create meaningful pathways towards credentialing in higher education. In this chapter we explore open learning and a learning journey through an Imaginarium from the perspective of a citizen in the context of a global human rights campaign. The chapter speculates the possibilities for gaining recognition of graduate attributes developed informally outside the institution, yet weaving through open education resources, when the citizen applies to study in an Australian University. We conclude by arguing the importance of seeing emerging developments in Australia related to open learning, micro-credentials, aligned learning outcomes (ALOs) and criterion referenced assessments (CRAs) through a recognition lens.

FRAMING THE IMAGINARIUM

This chapter presents an Imaginarium. An imaginarium is a type of place dedicated to imagination that may struggle to exist in the “reality tales” (Lather, 1991) of the institution. Using a methodology developed by Childs (2000, p. 77), the authors use “imaginary reconstruction (fictional writing within a research space)” to “construct a plausible and comprehensible text” (Childs, 2000, p. 76) that offers an alternative to current institutional thinking and practices. Here, a “feasible utopia” (Barnett, 2011, p. 439) might be imagined for Open Education within the university, based on the lived experience of a global citizen. In this chapter, the Imaginarium we explore is created in the nexus between a human rights campaign.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8856-8.ch012
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(same-sex marriage equality), and an imagined participant in that campaign – Ludmilla. “Ludmilla” is a fictional character used in this chapter to explore its thesis. She is a realistic character crafted from the lived experience of hundreds of students accessing recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessments conducted by the authors at undergraduate and postgraduate levels during 1996-2007 at a large regional university in Australia. We connect Ludmilla to the ideal of global citizenship as a graduate attribute; and thereby to credentialing. Our choice of the Same-Sex Marriage campaign as Ludmilla’s situated experience reflects “operational construct sampling” – that is, a real-world example (Patton, 1990, pp. 177-178) chosen because of currency in the global landscape and wealth of available materials. Our intention is to flip the focus away from the open education resources (OER) and questions about quality, openness and models about OER-for-credit; to the situated learning/activism of a citizen who may access OERs for their own reasons, then seek entry to university studies. This type of learning process can be referred to as “‘open-sourcing’ personal learning” (Fiedler, 2014, p. 1) but has historically been called “self-directed learning” and associated with monikers such as informal, non-formal, experiential and adult learning. Famously, Wedemeyer (1981) called this “learning at the back door” through his “reflections on non-traditional learning in the lifespan” in a pre-digital world. “At the backdoor” learning took place “wherever learners faced problems, a need to know, or wherever they could find materials or assistance. They learned at home, on the job, on farms, in libraries, at cultural events and community projects, and in church-related activities” (Wedemeyer, 1981, p. 28).

Three ideas are central to the argument put forward in this chapter. The first is that open learning can be seen through the lens of the citizen, rather than through the lens of the educator. The second is that learning gained outside the constraints of a formal program of study has value within higher education, particularly if seen from the perspective of the citizen’s enacted cognition, rather than from the perspective of a course (whether open or not). These ideas are discussed in depth below. The third important idea pertains to the example we’ve chosen to use concerning global citizenship and the implications a citizen’s open learning has for the institution.

Open Learning

Open learning is largely considered to be a noun used by educators to describe a type of learning, or as a collective noun used to subsume sets of practices. Its meaning has been debated for over forty years. For example, in 1989 a debate broke out in the Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning concerning ‘open learning’ and ‘distance learning’ and what Rumble (1989, p. 28) perceived to be “the misuse of language”. Calling for “greater clarity”, Rumble (1989, p. 35) proposed that “the term ‘open learning’ is sometimes being used to describe forms of provision that are anything but open”, and indeed in his conclusion, he passionately states that the use of “open learning” to describe systems “is a monstrous misuse of language which needs to be stopped now. Access is about individual learners, not about corporate providers; openness is about structure and dialogue, not about instrumental training”. However, he also recognises that “the concept of open education is ill-defined” and argues that it “has to do with matters related to access, freedom from the constraints of time and place, means, structure, dialogue, and the presence of support services” (Rumble, 1989, p. 35). In the same edition, Lewis (1986, p. 6) offered a much more provider-centric view of open learning, suggesting it is a “student centred” approach to educational schemes and courses, whereby learners are “given choice” about why, what, how, when they learn, how learning will be measured, who can help them learn, and what they might learn next. The two quite different understandings concerning open learning expressed by Rumble and Lewis were not