

# The Next Innovation

## Open educational resources

By DeLaina Tonks

My mother is a teacher. My aunts, uncles, and cousins are teachers. And I knew I wanted to be a teacher from the time I was five years old and started bossing the neighbor kids into playing school, insisting that they do their “homework” which was nothing more than worksheets I had painstakingly scrawled out with my budding penmanship. This was my first foray into the world of open educational resources (OER), although I didn’t realize it at the time. Little did I know that years later I would become the director of the Open High School of Utah, the first secondary school to use an entire curriculum based on open educational resources.

### What are Open educational resources?

Open educational resources consist of “teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or repurposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge” as defined in Wikipedia by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

### Why would anyone use OER?

The objective behind open educational resources is to create free and simple access to knowledge and information through collaboration and innovation. The process of creating and sharing curriculum based on OER is similar to the advent of the printing press, which made information available to the masses rather than to just those who knew how to read.

The use of open resources also makes it possible to very easily modify the curriculum to meet student needs. It’s impossible to rip a chapter out of a textbook if it isn’t what students need, but, by using OER, teachers are able to pinpoint which lessons are effective through the data we gather from scores. Those lessons that do not meet learner needs are enhanced or scrapped completely, giving the teacher the opportunity to find or create something better.

### Who creates and/or uses Open educational resources?

The Open High School of Utah joins the ranks of other organizations like CK12, Curriki, OER Commons, and The National Repository of Online Courses, who are also committed to creating, promoting, or hosting open educational resources. Besides, just about every teacher I know supplements his curriculum with teacher-created materials in order to best meet learner needs. Despite the volumes of prepackaged textbooks, CDs, DVDs, practice books, test booklets, and all other manner of ancillary materials we receive in our toolkits, there is always a gap here or there. Teachers fill gaps. Those materials are OER. Everybody’s already doing it! For example, the Open High School of Utah re-

leases its curriculum at [www.ocw.openhighschool.org](http://www.ocw.openhighschool.org).

### How are teachers building their curriculum?

The Open High curriculum is built from open educational resources, the foundation for its content, and is aligned with Utah state standards to ensure the highest quality educational experience. The teachers enhance with cutting-edge technology, like screen-casts, which are the equivalent of the teacher’s introduction to the curriculum for each week. Teachers record themselves walking the students through what to expect, laying the groundwork for a successful lesson. Additionally, interactive components such as chats, discussion boards, and forums are included so students can collaborate with each other. Each course contains projects, service learning, and cross-curricular components that lend relevance to each assignment by allowing students to understand real-world practical applications.

### But, if it’s free, how good can it really be?

Any teacher who has sat on a textbook adoption committee knows full well that there is a complete range of textbooks to choose from. Some are phenomenal while others leave much to be desired. Some OER is sub-par; other resources can be just the thing you are looking for. The great thing is that you have the ability to modify it to meet your needs.

### So, then what?

Teachers worldwide are already creating OER, so what’s next? There is real power in collaboration. We are on the cusp of a movement poised to change the face of education and you can play a role. I invite you to add a creative commons ([www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org)) license to your teacher-created materials and post them online. Feel free to use a repository like Curriki ([www.curriki.org](http://www.curriki.org)), or toss it in a free Google document ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)), then share the link with all the teachers you know. If you’re really tech-savvy, then you can tweet the link out under the #edchat hashtag. and teachers all over the world will have access to your work. This gives you the ability to indirectly influence the education of students worldwide! ■



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