Stage 2 – submission for UALL award 2017 – Pete Cannell

Opening Educational Practices in Scotland

OEPS is a three-year project, led by the Open University in Scotland.

In the last decade there has been a huge increase in the availability of free, online courses – many of these released under open licenses. However, despite predictions that this would democratise access to education, the profile of learners on these courses is highly skewed towards those who have already had access to further and higher education. The remit of the OEPS project is to understand why the promise of open, online education remains unfulfilled and to develop educational practice that supports the use of free and open for non-traditional participants in the formal and non-formal education sectors in Scotland.

Discourses on open educational resources emerged from and are embedded in the field of educational technology. The OEPS project is unique in coming to open education from a perspective of lifelong learning and social justice, approaching as a question of pedagogy. Educational practice and widening participation necessitates working across existing disciplinary boundaries and distinct communities of practice.

OEPS has operated from the beginning as a set of interconnected action research projects. Collaborative initiatives are developed with partners, tested in practice and then evaluated in order to inform further action. This process enables the collection of data and evidence. Reflection on this evidence informs new initiatives and ensures that the project findings are well grounded.

To date, the project has worked collaboratively with 62 organisations across Scotland. It has facilitated 72 participative workshops and 4 open forums in addition to other events and activities. Although the project has worked expansively across the sector, it is sharply focused on developing models that bring together lifelong learning and innovative open educational practice. This is evidenced through case studies of new practice aimed at overcoming barriers to participation; through the creation of free, online courses on OpenLearn Works; through an online hub for good practice (www.oeps.ac.uk), through a project blog (www.oepscotland.org); reports and the publication of peer reviewed papers.

Commented [RM1]: Scanning through I note the previous sense and this one need a couple of readings when run together. It is because it is not clear that the focus on this sentence is OEPS focus until one gets to the sentence after. Does that make sense. I have made some changes

I think this is the bit around how we approached partnership work that might be creative, so useful to emphasise.

As our network grew, we uncovered a sharp contrast between the formal and non-formal education sectors. Universities and colleges predominantly approach free and open through the frame of MOOCs. Third sector organisations, trade unions and community groups, on the other hand, are grappling with what education and training looks like in a digital world. Until recently, a concern for social justice agendas tended to mean that online resources would be avoided. With the advent of ubiquitous mobile devices most organisations now believe that equipping potential learners with digital skills is essential.

Partnership working has been about learning together and co-creating practice through drawing on the resources, skill and experience of the OEPS team and the partner. We have developed the 'course' team model, with teams that include practitioners and learners from the partner organisation. We have also developed approaches to designing new practice and new resources that draw heavily on concepts from participative design. From the outset, our aim has been to work in the open. All resources, templates and designs are openly licensed and available for reuse and reversioning.

Some illustrative examples:

Early on in the project we worked with People Know How (PKH) an Edinburgh based charity that tackles inequality from the standpoint of social innovation. Together we developed thinking on appropriate pedagogy for use in social settings. PKH successfully piloted the use of openly licensed online material in their new Social Innovation Academy.

Working with Scottish Union Learning (SUL) has provided valuable insights into the barriers to engaging with online resources. In the summer and autumn of 2015 we ran two series of participative workshops across Scotland with 90 Union Learning Representatives, sharing experience and good practice. The outcomes have informed SUL's digital learning strategy. We developed understanding of how 'traditional' barriers to participation intersect and interact in new ways with elements of the digital environment. A further output is an open online course aimed at supporting facilitators of learning in workplace settings.

By the end of the project we expect to have supported the development of 13 new free online courses that serve as exemplars of good practice. 'Understanding Parkinson's', developed with Parkinson's UK was the first course to be launched. Aimed at 'non-traditional' learners working in residential care, it supports peer engagement and reflective practice. So far 368 learners have enrolled and 118 achieved the digital badge.

In summer 2017, we will launch a course for teachers that looks at gender bias in STEM. This involves collaboration with WP practitioners from across the formal education sector and the Equality Challenge Unit.

749 words