

The Potential Role Of Open Educational Practice Policy In Transforming Australian Higher Education

Carina Bossu 

University of Tasmania (Australia)

carina.bossu@gmail.com

Adrian Stagg 

University of Southern Queensland (Australia)

Adrian.stagg@usq.edu.au

Abstract

Open Educational Practices (OEP) have played an important role in assisting educational institutions and governments worldwide to meet their current and future educational targets in widening participation, lowering costs, improving the quality of learning and teaching and promoting social inclusion and participatory democracy. There have been some important OEP developments in Australia, but unfortunately the potential of OEP to meet some of the national educational targets has not been fully realised and acknowledged yet, in ways that many countries around the world have. This paper will gather, discuss, and analyse some key national and international policies and documentation available as an attempt to provide a solid foundation for a call to action for OEP in Australia, which will hopefully be an instrument to assist and connect practitioners and policy makers in higher education.

Keywords: open educational practice; OEP; OEP policies; open policies; higher education policy; Australia

Introduction

Open Educational Practices (OEP) support flexible educational practices and the promotion of quality and innovation learning and teaching within open learning ecologies (Open Educational Quality Initiative, 2011; Paskevicius, 2017). OEP have been playing an important role in assisting higher education sectors and governments worldwide to meet current and future educational targets in widening participation, lowering costs, improving the quality of learning and teaching, promoting social inclusion, and participatory democracy. However, as open practices are still relatively new educational approaches, mature and transferable supporting policies are yet to become mainstream. Even so, many countries have attempted to trial, develop, and implement educational policies that incorporate and recognise OEP activities and programs, in order to leverage the affordances to meet the previously mentioned targets.

Over the last decade, the scope of OEP in Australian higher education has expanded, influencing learning and teaching. Following international momentum to ‘open up’ education via a number of global OEP initiatives, some Australian universities have engaged in institutional and collaborative projects; both internally and federally funded.

Likewise, state (schools, and professional and vocational training) and federal levels have begun to engage through initiatives such as AusGOAL (<https://www.australia.gov.au/directories/australia/ausgoal>) and Government 2.0 (<https://www.finance.gov.au/archive/policy-guides-procurement/gov20/>). Federal initiatives have also focused on open source software (OSS) adoption, freely and openly licencing government documents and reports, and open access to publically-funded research. The latter is supported by institutional repositories that store, and

make available research output and data, usually enabled by Creative Commons licences. This responds to pressure from research funding bodies who increasingly stipulate open access in funding requirements (Picasso & Phelan, 2014).

Whilst these initiatives are equivalent to other global open access practices - notably those in the UK, the US, Canada and across the European Union - Australian federal attention has not yet focused on educational resources. Australia does not have a specific framework or regulation that supports higher education adoption of OER or OEP (Stagg & Bossu, 2016), unlike more mature policies in the previously cited countries.

Despite this lack of national priority focus, a small number of OEP reports and research projects have been funded by the previous Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) to investigate and develop OEP across the sector. These reports have all strongly lobbied for OEP intervention, support, and policy development at national level (Bossu, Brown & Bull, 2014; Bossu et al., 2016).

However, despite federal funding, the Australian government has failed to commit to, or reflect, the recommendations in educational policy. This paper will contribute to the Australian open policy environment by articulating the role of educational policy and the links between current government targets and OEP. The position taken is that educational policy can be framed as a lever for action by institutions, funding bodies, and practitioners, but can create risk via the promotion of a policy-compliance culture – a culture that is antithetical to openness. The paper concludes with a call to action anchored to three recommendations for OEP in Australian higher education. Before starting the related policy discussion, an overview of OEP is needed for better understanding of issues being explored in this paper.

The Potential Of Open Educational Practices

Open educational practice (OEP) emerged as an evolution of the open educational resources (OER) movement, where the focus was mostly on increasing access to new and existing digital educational resources. Although OEP is still a new field of study within education, some preconditions for adopting OEP effectively have already been established:

- There should be engagement amongst all of the stakeholders in the OER process (authors, users, managers and policy makers).
- Ensuring that there is support to guide creation and use of OER, and technologies to assist storage and dissemination.
- An understanding of the context in which OEP is adopted and implemented (Open Educational Quality Initiative, 2011).

Even though OEP have not reached mainstream education yet, they have certainly transformed and challenged the core values and structures of higher education around the world, but unfortunately, with less intensity in Australia. From the way learners are now experiencing learning and empowered being co-creators of knowledge, to how learning should be designed to maximise these experiences, to the current role of educators and the new strategies and support required from educational institutions to recognise and accredit such learning (Smyth, Bossu & Stagg, 2016). In many cases, OEP has promoted further collaborations amongst institutions, encouraged further dialogue and stakeholder engagement in higher education, and motivated the use of open technologies and new open pedagogical approaches, as a way to incorporate some of the current transformation in pedagogy and curriculum. However, as in other areas of education, policies at institutional and

national levels also play an important role in OEP, by providing guidance, structure, boundaries, recognition and alignment with other aspects of the system in which OEP belongs to.

The Role Of Educational Policy

Australian higher education has traditionally viewed educational policy as intrinsically linked to social equity and inclusion. The most common lens for articulating these principles has been “population parity” (Naylor & James, 2015, p. 1); or the statistically proportional inclusion of under-represented socio-cultural, and socio-economic population groups. This has been mirrored in government-set targets (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008), and in university responses to policy (Universities Australia, 2016). This tone, set by the Labour Education Minister John Dawkins in *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (1988) was underscored by his perception of the role of universities, namely;

[the university] is a primary source of the skills we need in our cultural, artistic, intellectual and industrial life. It acts to gather and preserve knowledge. It promotes greater understanding of culture, *often at odds with majority attitudes*, and in doing so, supports the development of a more just and tolerant society (Dawkins, 1988, p. 7, emphasis added)

However, contemporary educational policy is directly at odds with the humanist perception of the societal value of education. This value has shifted from social participation and that understanding of broader culture (*‘often at odds with majority attitudes’*) and instead indexes outcomes against a neo-liberal economic rationalisation of a university education as narrowly aligned with job-readiness and future economic success. Given this perceptual shift, it can be reasonably argued that the ‘value proposition’ of open educational practice (OEP) in the current political climate needs to be examined critically by practitioners, especially if levers – in the form of national policy – are sought.

Public And Private Good: An Ideological Difference In Policy

The notion of the university as a ‘public good’ is reflected in early Australian educational policy. Dawkins’ statement explicitly states that:

We want to be a society that understands its own political processes, enables all citizens to participate in those processes and does not accept without question decisions made on its behalf... We do not want a higher education system that fails to analyse and, where necessary, criticise the society in which it operates, *or one that chooses not to spread knowledge among those with fewer opportunities to increase their own understanding of events* (Dawkins, 1988, p. 7; emphasis added)

Higher education was perceived as a public good – the keystone to an inclusive national agenda of societal participation. The implicit philosophy was that citizens had the right of access to education, with higher education providing a societal role that often transcended the prevailing norm. However, counter-productive government policy was instituted the same year with HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme). Students were now incumbent for university fees, and the new Scheme notionally made university more accessible by allowing students to defer their fees as a government loan that would be repaid once their future earnings reached a set threshold (income-contingent loans). This threshold has been varied over the last three decades, and the repayment of student loans has not been without criticism, both within Australia and in countries like the UK which also administer income-contingent loans (Findeisen & Sachs, 2016). By linking student loans to income, governments form explicit inter-relationships between education and tax regimes (Findeisen & Sachs, 2016). There have even been suggestions of emerging alternatives or amendments to income-contingent loans,

such as normalising the national student debt by levying higher tax repayments for students in higher tax brackets - which would result in high-earners re-paying more than the base sum of the loan, whilst lower earners repay less than the total sum of their loan (Findeisen & Sachs, 2016), to systems that allow individual investors to pay for student loans and then enter into income-sharing arrangements post-graduation (Holliday & Gide, 2016). In either case, the introduction of HECS signalled a three-decades-long perceptual shift away from the common good, and that directly impacts on the perception and values that underpins OEP.

The 'Value Of Education'

The language and value statement of universities has likewise dramatically changed in the last thirty years. Universities Australia (2016) focuses on highlighting the contribution of the higher education sector to the national economy (p. 3), international competitiveness (p. 3), the need for government funding to “position Australia cleverly for future prosperity” (p. 4), and increasing investment in industry-collaborative research partnerships to foster innovate and entrepreneurial graduates and researchers (p. 7). The statement ascribes dollar values to the “stock of knowledge” (p. 8), describes future graduates as “our future leaders, inventors, and wealth generators” (p. 12) and that they exit degrees “career-ready [and] globally competitive” (p. 13). Almost absent in this document is the university’s role in building a participatory democracy, and the three-decade-old statements about universities providing critical viewpoints have been replaced by a preference for increasing economic growth and the rationalisation of education as an export.

The substantive change in discourse is unsurprising when the perception of graduate outcomes is considered. An increasing commodification and massification of higher education are symptoms of the neo-liberalist interpretation of the university that is reflected in the language of *Keep It Clever: Policy Statement 2016*, which is a report published by Universities Australia (2016). There is also an element of ‘moral panic’ in the rhetoric surrounding Australia’s ‘decline’ and ‘loses’ on a globalised landscape (Zajda, 2013, p. 234). Rather than design a higher education system based primarily on ‘social good’, the Australian system has privileged organisational restructuring, positioning, and outcomes on corporatized models – and now uses this structure for reporting and accountability (Zajda, 2013). The resulting perception is of education as a tradable, exportable commodity – a product with a defined economic value, and one that represents a market-driven investment by the consumer (students). Education is unable to be commodified (Connell, 2013), but associated aspects of the experience can. The reintroduction of student fees supported by a student loans scheme (HECS), and the publishing of ‘league tables’ for university research outcomes, for example, reinforce a scarcity model. Student fees for education are paid by the individual, not the State, which reinforces that education is a ‘private good’ – that the outcomes based on individual investment, and that the benefits are likewise personal rather than for society. League tables present a hierarchy of institutions nationally, creating a false sense of ‘quality’ – or rather prestige for individual investment. Reputational capital through credentialing becomes a commodity as the individual trades on the reputation of their *alma mater* for advantage in the job market.

This change from a humanist ideology of higher education to one predicated by economic values and labour market readiness creates an environment that inherently challenges open educational practice at the level of national policy. Open education is often presented as “social good” (Glennie, Harley, Butcher & van Wyk, 2012, p. 7) – that can lead to either uncritical research or a lack of evaluative processes. This political and ideological shift may be responsible for the prevalence of research-focused open policy, and a lack of Australian educational resource policy (Stagg & Bossu, 2016). Open data has been positioned as an enabler for research collaboration, cross-disciplinary

research, and reducing the cost of original research data collection – all outcomes consistent with economic rationalisation.

It is into this environment that open practice must demonstrate a clear value proposition. Open practitioners need to be mindful of the underpinning rationale shaping educational policy in Australia and how higher educational institutions have become complicit in recasting the value of education in society. It is therefore unsurprising that open educational practice is able to gain traction in Australia at the practitioner and institutional levels - as more bounded cultural values can be expressed at these levels with sufficient leverage - yet has failed to make any impact (or even reach a basic level of awareness) at the national level. The role of open policy advocates therefore becomes more complex - not just in lobbying for change, but in finding 'common ground' between differing ideologies. The crux of this challenge, therefore, how do stakeholders in educational policy locate this 'common ground' as a way of bridging the current disconnect between disparate policy viewpoints?

Educational policy as it relates to 'the common good', currently exists mostly for an agenda of social inclusion, and for academic freedom in Australia. These two areas are selected for comparison as they are founded in the values inherent in, and value of, educational systems; thus there is certain conceptual alignment with OEP. However, both manifest problematically in the national environment. It is the alignment of OEP with existing policy targets and foci that are of specific interest to this paper.

Since 1988, the approaches and metrics for attaining social inclusion have been under sustained criticism for both the classification proxies used to determine targets and eligibility, and the superficiality of reporting against targets. Classification of student equity groups is reliant on postcode of students' place of origin and further predicated on parental occupation (Universities Australia, 2008). These imprecise measures that fail to account for a multi-causal understanding of intentions to, and the experience of, study are the foundation for Australian social inclusion targets. Additionally, the results of high school education are used by all states as part of university admissions, although secondary school performance is not always an indicator of university success (Naylor & James, 2015). It is unsurprising then, that despite three decades of policy, widening access for students from remote and rural communities and low socio-economic backgrounds remains "one of the persistent and seemingly intractable equity issues in Australia" (James, 2012, p. 85). Policy built on these measurements, and reliant on secondary school academic barriers is challenged to deliver meaningful outcomes. There is little evidence to suggest that under-represented groups have little aspiration to attend university – the main challenge facing these learners is access to education (Naylor & James, 2015).

Reporting against inclusion targets is likewise a problematic space as the primary statistical data presented in policy documents such as *Keep It Clever: Policy Statement 2016* rely on absolute numbers as opposed to representational statistics. For example, 2014 data reports a 60% increase in indigenous students (from 7038 in 2008 to 11286 in 2014), claiming a direct positive correlation between the implementation of a demand-driven education system in 2008 and improved social equity (Universities Australia, 2016, p. 18). However, this change represents an increase from 1.4% to 1.6% when viewed as a portion of total student numbers from 2008 to 2014; students from low socio-economic backgrounds increased from 16.8% to 18.2% over the same period; and regional and remote students as part of total student population decreased from 20.7% to 20.4% (Universities Australia, 2016, p. 18). Despite policy targets and national agendas, little improvement was demonstrated over the six years.

Similarly, academic freedom historically languished as a value under legislative compliance. The 2003 Higher Education Support Act (HESA) makes every institution responsible for including a statement interpreting and contextualising academic freedom; this action is legislatively required. A national audit conducted in 2008 (five years after the activity became Federal law) found that only eight

universities (19%) were compliant; thirty-four institutions lacked any statement pertaining to academic freedom, despite the necessity of Federal compliance (Analysis and Policy Observatory, 2008).

In both cases, intentional policy has not been able to mobilise resources, or mitigate challenges faced by the entire sector. Rather, the environment is either one of non-compliance (academic freedom), or one that applies superficial, ill-fitting metrics (social inclusion). Furthermore, social inclusion targets are primarily concerned with reporting enrolments among particular student cohorts – currently there are no requirements to report retention, attrition, and academic performance for the cohort. This leads to a demand-driven model that focuses on student entry, potentially at the expense of strategic resource allocation to student support mechanisms.

Any discussion of policy-driven OEP activity, therefore, needs to analyse the deficiencies in a singular approach, and rather seek to establish an environment in which OEP presents a strong value proposition, rather than simply striving for mandated targets.

National Level Oep Supporting Documents

There have been attempts to provide evidence-based guidelines and recommendations at national level to influence Australian government OEP strategies and activities. Ironically, these guidelines and recommendations have been mostly developed through indirect government funded research projects and fellowships, such as the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT).

One example of these developments is the *Feasibility Protocol*, a set of guiding principles to assist OEP practitioners, senior executives and policy maker to make informed decisions regarding the adoption of OER at different levels; individual levels, including educators and learners, institutional levels and at the sector level (Bossu, Bull & Brown, 2015). The feasibility was a key outcome of a two year project (2010 to 2012) funded by the OLT, which surveyed key stakeholders across the Australian higher education sector to uncover the state of play of OEP in Australia, including the use of OER, participants' awareness and willingness to engage with OEP (Bossu et al., 2014). Most importantly, findings from this project provided in a set of principles to policy and decision makers at the sector level to consider. Some of them include:

- Provide government incentives and funding to promote research in OEP and encourage adoption across the higher education sector;
- Develop national level OEP dedicated policies to provide educational institutions and practitioners guidance on OEP engagement;
- Investigate the opportunities that OEP can bring to bridge the gap between formal and informal education;
- Consider OEP as a way to support the diverse student cohort across the higher education sector in Australia (eg. remote and rural students, adult and distance learners and national, international, refugee, imprisoned etc.); and
- Examine how OEP can play an important role in positioning the Australian higher education sector in the global stage (e.g. by adopting the 2012 Paris OER Declaration and other related declarations) (Bossu et al., 2014).

Amongst more recent funded projects is the *Students, Universities and Open Education* (OpenEdOz) project (<http://openedoz.org/>). The OpenEdOz was built on previous related projects, and aimed to bridge the OEP policy gap at national level (Wills, Alexander & Sadler, 2016). One of its main deliverables was a Roadmap to a National OEP Strategy, which intended to assist the government to realise the potential of OEP for the Australian higher education sector and open up opportunities for further national policy development and support in which OEP can flourish. The policy roadmap

was informed by the analysis of a range of national and international evidenced-based case studies related to OEP projects and initiatives gathered during the project (Bossu et al., 2016). The Roadmap is a detailed instrument, and shows the complexities of OEP adoption. It provides 25 Contributing Strategies divided by 10 Signposts, including Advocacy, Students, Teachers, Standards, Intellectual property, licensing and copyright, ICT infrastructure, research, and so forth. Also, the Roadmap suggests a number of relevant national organisations that would be appropriate and possibly “facilitators of action” to each of its strategies (Wills et al., 2016, p. 8).

Additionally, a study commissioned by the Higher Education Standards Panel and the OLT to report on the challenges, issues, opportunities and the effects that existing alternative models to deliver and recognise students’ learning can pose to Australian universities, to the sector and to the Higher Education Standards Framework (Ewan, 2016). According to the author, “it offers a view of the landscape and highlights aspects of the topography that will likely influence higher education’s journey into the future.” (Ewan, 2016, p. 6). Relevant to this paper however, is the set of suggestions made to higher education policy makers, which states that:

A coordinated approach will be necessary to ensure that Australia is not left behind in the wave of global attention to open education and the considerable implications it will have...Foremost among these is the need to agree on a national strategy to leverage contemporary IT for improving productivity of higher education through use of Open Educational Resources and the need for a national body to drive the strategy development (Ewan, 2016, p. 59).

These projects represent attempts to provide evidence-based recommendations and show legitimate concerns that the delay in adopting and lack of support for OEP initiatives could have serious consequences to higher education in Australia. Most importantly, findings from currently research shows that OEP has the potential to restore the essence of education, its value and purpose. OER, coupled with open practices can assist the Australia government to meet its educational targets to increase access to higher education to rural and remote students at a lower cost, therefore reducing student debt. By encouraging OEP at national level, the Australian government would still guarantee excellence and quality of education, as OEP can enable flexibility, innovative and affordability in learning and teaching. In fact, these are some of the elements underpinning the current paper titled *Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education* (Australian Government, 2016). This paper discusses “potential reforms that support the Government’s vision of a stronger, more innovative and responsive system of higher education that preserves equity of access while meeting the financial sustainability savings” suggested in the current federal budget (Australian Government, 2016, p. 3). Unfortunately, it seems that the Australian educational system, in particularly higher education, is losing an opportunity by not adopting OEP as an approach to solve these challenges.

Crafting A Call For Action

Globally OEP policy developments have been maturing rapidly. There are currently several national level approaches and strategies being adopted by key global developed, and developing, economies around the world as an attempt to engage with OEP. These developments include investments and strong support of OEP through policy, funds, declarations and research and are largely motivated by the recognition of the role of OEP in meeting educational and social inclusion targets and policies, as the demand for access to education increases and the capacity of educational institutional to deliver education remains stagnated. Other factors influencing the growing number of such policy developments are, for example, the increasing numbers of OER and OEP initiatives, the growing levels of awareness of OEP, the rise in funding opportunities by national, international and philanthropic

organisations, and the support and recognition of OEP by international bodies such as UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) through documents and declarations.

The most recent document developed in collaboration with governments' entities and international bodies was the Ljubljana OER Action Plan (UNESCO, 2017), which was created during the 2nd World Open Educational Resources (OER) Congress, hosted by UNESCO and the government of Slovenia in 2017. This Action Plan acknowledges and builds on existing declarations and guidelines on Open Educational Resources such as the *Paris OER Declaration* (UNESCO, 2012), the 2007 *Cape Town Open Education Declaration* (<http://www.capetowndeclaration.org/read-the-declaration>), the 2009 *Dakar Declaration on Open Educational Resources*, and the 2015 COL and UNESCO *Guidelines on Open Educational Resources in Higher Education* (Commonwealth of Learning, 2015). These are important international documents and strategies that have been providing the foundations for countries, nations and organisations to develop OEP capacity and support policy development.

However, Australian developments remain unsupported and isolated. Many educational institutions leaders and practitioners are aware of OEP but the lack of national support and a commodified educational system, leave them with limited or no options but meet government targets to receive their share of federal funds. Australian OEP researchers and advocates believe that meaningful strategies are required for Australia to achieve comparable results in OEP and that these strategies must reach stakeholders at several levels, including sector, institutional and individual levels. Below, the authors make recommendations for a call to action at these levels. This call is underpinned and supported by existing research in the field of OEP, policy guidelines and frameworks developed to assist policy makers, intuitional leaders and practitioners to adopt OEP.

Policy Development

As discussed above and as in most countries, educational policy has played a significant role in shaping higher education in Australia. Open policies in particular have gained importance as OEP advances globally. According to the *Going Open: Policy Recommendations on Open Education in Europe (OpenEdu Policies)* research report, "policies on open education are extremely important in encouraging institutions and individual educators to embrace open education in their own work. Besides providing the right framework for action, they raise awareness and help individuals make decisions that will lead to the achievement of a common goal" (Inamorato dos Santos, 2017, p. 24).

The authors believe that policy development for OEP in Australia would be a helpful support to increase the adoption of OEP across the sector by becoming a lever for action at the institutional and practitioner levels for the purpose of meeting educational outcome goals, and potentially changing the way educational institutions look at knowledge resources, and teaching. However, policy development should be one of the actions to be taken towards OEP adoption. This is because, and as discussed previously, when misapplied, policy becomes a tool of compliance, or of abrogated responsibility.

One key example is the status of academic freedom in Australia, included in the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Australian Government, 2003), which gives the educational institutions the responsibility to articulate the values, scope, and spirit of this freedom. This is federal law and yet only eight of the forty-two universities have complied (after the Act has been in force for fourteen years). In other words, the fact that a policy exists does not guarantee that it will give the intended results or even be applied.

Therefore, policy development for OEP in Australia should be for national awareness and provide options and directions for practitioners, national interest groups, discipline-specific bodies, and institutions, knowing that these directions would have government support. Our stance is also supported by the Ljubljana OER Action Plan (UNESCO, 2017).

Raise Awareness

OEP, and consequently OER, awareness raising have been one of the key recommendations and call for action in several research publications and reports in Australia (Bossu et al, 2014; Wills et al, 2016; Ewan, 2016) and elsewhere (OPAL, 2011; COL, 2015, UNESCO, 2012). In fact, in the seminal work *Open Educational Resources: A way forward* (D'Antoni, 2008), *awareness raising* was the number one "priority for promoting the advancement of the OER movement" (p. 11), followed by *communities* and *capacity development* (which is the action discussed next). In addition, increase understanding of OEP amongst stakeholders will assist policy maker, educational leaders and practitioners to make informed decisions about the adoption of OEP within their contexts, so that they take full advantage of the potential of OEP to enhance and innovate learning and teaching in higher education in Australia.

However, a recent report published by the Babson Survey Research Group (Seaman & Seaman, 2017) revealed that despite the fact that awareness of, in this case just OER amongst U.S academics has increased from previous years, "the proportion that reported they had never heard of OER fell from 66 percent in 2014-15 to [only] 56 percent this year", indicating that overall understanding of OER is still low (Seaman & Seaman, 2017).

One strategy to raise understanding of OEP is to engage a range of stakeholders in dialog and consultation regarding OEP and its potential role to support higher education in Australia (Smyth, Bossu, & Stagg, 2016). Attempts should be made to develop a national community of practice (CoP) in OEP in Australia, where participants would have the opportunity to contribute discussions at national, institutional and practitioner levels. Other engagement activities that would assist raise awareness regarding OEP are: to further review existing national and international OEP policies; to undertake further research in OEP; to disseminate research findings to the sector; to develop and compile resources for government, institutions and practitioners and to mechanisms to evaluate impact.

Capacity Building

Capacity building can be key to raising understanding and empowering educators to make informed decisions about enhancing learning and teaching within their contexts. It is important to understand that transformation and change, particularly within the higher education landscape, can occur very slowly and can attract many sceptics. Academic staff professional development and capacity-building are important and influential instruments to empower academic staff to embrace and participate in change (Healey, Bradford, Roberts, & Knight, 2013). Previous research on OEP have identified a lack of appropriate capacity building programs available for academics as one of the main reasons for the limited adoption of OEP in Australian universities (Bossu et al., 2014). Similarly, this call for action has also been recommended by several international publications and reports (D'Antoni, 2008, OPAL, 2011; COL, 2015, UNESCO, 2012), including the most recent *Ljubljana OER Action Plan* (UNESCO, 2017).

Therefore, educational institutions must provide educators with opportunities for building capacity in OEP, so that they understand and take full advantage of the opportunities of OEP. There is a substantial body of literature exploring methods, approaches, frameworks and techniques for capacity building worldwide, particular for the use of learning technology to enhance learning and teaching (Kirkwood & Price, 2014). Also, there are many resources available on the web to assist academic staff to develop further skills in OEP, including government websites, professional associations, research groups and universities' websites. Even though there is no one-size-fits-all capacity building approach, the strategies available has the potential to assist academic developers and academic staff in providing theoretical and practical basis for program implementation.

In Australia, capacity building programs to promote OEP in higher education seem to be the most popular strategy amongst the universities starting experimenting with OEP, as capacity building can be key to OEP adoption through raising awareness and understanding of the potential of OEP to enhance learning and teaching (Bossu & Fountain, 2015). However, in order to promote long lasting transformation in learning and teaching, capacity building programs for educators should be engaging and hands-on, and promote reflection on practice so that they can realise the potential and possibilities of OEP to help their students learn through their previous professional experiences and beliefs (Webb, 2003).

Conclusion And Final Considerations

University-level adoption of OEP is not completely contingent on national policy, but whole-of-sector traction is reliant on national-level awareness from policy makers. It is the realisation that the current rhetoric positions education as a 'private good' and one that can be commercialised and 'exported' that drives a deeper understanding of how to construct a value proposition for OEP in the policy space. This realisation can be argued as a causal link between the misalignment of the goals of OEP lobbyists and government policy-makers. If OEP is positioned as 'disruptive' or 'in conflict' with current educational practices, gaining traction becomes even more problematic.

As a response to the possible conflicts in ideologies, a middle ground can be established by identifying opportunities to explicitly link open practices to current educational practices. This positions OEP as a supporting approach (and not the only approach) to achieving articulated outcomes for Australian Higher Education. This paper has outlined the ideological differences that Australian higher education is ill-developed in open practice, despite sharing concerns for equity of access, scalability, and collaboration. It is necessary therefore to show that openness is not a direct competitor with traditional education systems, but an approach that can enhance, and provide innovative and substantively new opportunities for learning and teaching in Australia, benefiting not only learners and educators from all walks of life, but also institutions and governments nationally and internationally. Based on existing body of knowledge and supporting policy documents in OEP, including the recent the Ljubljana OER Action Plan (UNESCO, 2017), we proposed a call for action that includes three key dimensions; policy development, raise awareness and capacity building. These dimensions should be developed at sector, institutional and practitioner levels to promote a more holistic understanding and approach to OEP in Australian higher education.

As a final consideration, we also would like to recommend to OEP researchers, advocates, educational leaders and policy makers that this call for action should be underpinned by a translational research framework. Originally applied to public health research and policy, translational research aims to bridge the gap between policy makers and practitioners (Wethington & Dunifon, 2012), a perceptual and ideological disconnect among stakeholders that has been discussed in this paper. It encourages a more holistic understanding of phenomena, by considering data, contextual influences and factors, and the nature of the broader environment in which the phenomenon sits. Translational research has been viewed as an appropriate lens for educational research, especially as it intersects with public policy and seeks collaborative representation from a wider range of stakeholders (Brabeck, 2008; Mitchell, 2016). Translational research can draw upon diverse data sources to support specific foci and outcomes. By adopting an approach founded in translational research it is possible to engage in a more inclusive and open discussion with stakeholders and to collaboratively seek the alignment and value of OEP in a national agenda. As such, this research approach would be underpinned by a major question driving this paper – is there a 'middle ground' for OEP and educational policy, and if so, how do unearth this foundation to build policy that reflects the diverse needs of Australia as a society that embraces access to education?

Acknowledgment

This paper was presented at the 2018 Open Education Consortium Global Conference, held in Delft (The Netherlands) in April 24th-26th 2018 (<https://conference.oeconsortium.org/2018>), with whom *Open Praxis* established a partnership. After a pre-selection by the Conference Committee, the paper underwent the usual peer-review process in *Open Praxis*.

References

- Analysis and Policy Observatory (2008). Academic freedom in Australia. *Australian Review of Public Affairs*, 28 December 2008. Retrieved from <http://apo.org.au/node/1614>
- Australian Government (2003). *Higher Education Support Act 2003*. Federal Register of Legislation. Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A01234>
- Australian Government (2016). *Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education*. Canberra: Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/driving-innovation-fairness-and-excellence-australian-education>
- Bossu, C., Brown, M., & Bull, D. (2014). *Adoption, use and management of Open Educational Resources to enhance teaching and learning in Australia*. Sydney: Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. Retrieved from http://www.olt.gov.au/system/files/resources/CG10_1687_Bossu_Report_2014.pdf
- Bossu, C., Bull, D., & Brown, M. (2015). Enabling Open Education: A Feasibility Protocol for Australian Higher Education. In C. Bonk, M. Lee, T. Reeves & T. Reynolds (Eds.), *MOOCs and Open Education Around the World*. Routledge.
- Bossu, C., & Fountain, W. (2015). Capacity-building in open education: an Australian approach. *Open Praxis*, 7(2), 123-132. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.7.2.197>
- Bossu, C., Ward, L., Wills, S., Alexander, S., Sadler, D., Kandlbinder, P., . . . Uys, P. (2016). A national strategy to promote Open Educational Practices in higher education in Australia. Paper presented at the *33rd International Conference on Innovation, Practice and Research in the Use of Educational Technologies in Tertiary Education (ASCILITE 2016): Show Me The Learning*, Adelaide, SA. Retrieved from <http://2016conference.ascilite.org/wp-content/uploads/ASCILITE-2016-full-proceedings-Updated-1512.pdf>
- Brabeck, M. (2008). Why We Need 'Translational' Research. *Education Week*, 27(38), 28-36. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/05/21/38brabeck.h27.html>
- Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H., & Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A32134>
- Commonwealth of Learning (2015). *Guidelines for Open Educational Resources (OER) in Higher Education* (2nd ed.). Canada: UNESCO/Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002136/213605e.pdf>
- Connell, R. (2013). Why do market 'reforms' persistently increase inequality? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(2), 279-285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.770253>
- D'Antoni, S. (2008). *Open Educational Resources: The Way Forward. Deliberations of an International Community of Interest*. Retrieved from <http://learn.creativecommons.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/oer-way-forward-final-version.pdf>
- Dawkins, J. (1988). *Higher education: a policy statement*. Canberra: Australian government publication service.
- Ewan, C. (2016). *Higher Education Standards in a Disaggregated Learning Environment*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from http://altf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Ewan_C_HESP_Fellow_Report_2016.pdf

- Findeisen, S., & Sachs, D. (2016). Education and optimal dynamic taxation: The role of income-contingent student loans. *Journal of Public Economics*, 138, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2016.03.009>
- Glennie, J., Harley, K., Butcher, N., & van Wyk, T. (Eds.). (2012). *Open Educational Resources and change in Higher Education: reflections from practice: perspectives on open and distance learning*. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning.
- Healey, M., Bradford, M., Roberts, C., & Knight, Y. (2013). Collaborative discipline-based curriculum change: applying Change Academy processes at department level. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 18(1), 31-44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2011.628394>
- Holliday, S. M., & Gide, E. (2016). Funding Higher Education in Australia: A Comprehensive Analysis of Income Share Agreement as an Alternative to Income Contingent Loans. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 15(1). Retrieved from <https://www.ijlter.org/index.php/ijlter/article/view/536>
- Inamorato dos Santos, A. (2017). *Going Open – Policy Recommendations on Open Education in Europe (OpenEdu Policies)*. Ed: Punie, Y., Scheller, K.D.A., Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. <https://doi.org/10.2760/111707>
- James, R. (2012). Social inclusion in a globalised higher education environment: The issue of equitable access to university in Australia. In T. Basit & S. Tomlinson (eds.). *Social inclusion and higher education* (pp. 83-108). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Kirkwood, A., & Price, L. (2014). Technology-enhanced learning and teaching in higher education: what is 'enhanced' and how do we know? A critical literature review. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 39(1), 6-36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2013.770404>
- Mitchell, P. (2016). *From concept to classroom. What is translational research?* Australia: The Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Naylor, R., & James, R. (2015). Systemic equity challenges: An overview of the role of Australian universities in student equity and social inclusion. In M. Shah, A. Bennett & E. Southgate (Eds.). *Widening Higher Education Participation* (pp. 1-13). United States: Elsevier.
- Open Educational Quality Initiative (2011). *Beyond OER: Shifting Focus to Open Educational Practices*. Retrieved from <https://oerknowledgecloud.org/sites/oerknowledgecloud.org/files/OPAL2011.pdf>
- Paskevicius, M. (2017). Conceptualizing Open Educational Practices through the Lens of Constructive Alignment. *Open Praxis*, 9(2), 125-140. <https://doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.9.2.519>
- Picasso, V., & Phelan, L. (2014). The evolution of open access to research and data in Australian higher education. *RUSC. Universities and Knowledge Society Journal*, 11(3), 122-133. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7238/rusc.v11i3.2076>
- Seaman, J. & Seaman, J. (2017). *Opening the Textbook: Educational Resources in U.S. Higher Education*. Babson Survey Research Group. Retrieved from <https://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/openingthetextbook2017.pdf>
- Smyth, R., Bossu, C., & Stagg, A. (2016). Toward an Open Empowered Learning Model of pedagogy in higher education. In S. Reushle, A. Antonio & M. Keppell (Eds.), *Open Learning and Formal Credentialing in Higher Education: Curriculum Models and Institutional Policies*. Hershey, PA, USA: IGI Global.
- Stagg, A., & Bossu, C. (2016). Educational policy and open educational practice in Australian Higher Education. In P. Blessinger & T. Bliss (Eds.), *Open Education: International Perspectives in Higher Education* (pp. 115-136). UK: Open Book Publishers. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1sq5v9n.11>
- UNESCO (2012). 2012 Paris OER Declaration. *World Open Educational Resources (OER) Congress*. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/Events/Paris%20OER%20Declaration_01.pdf

- UNESCO (2017). Ljubljana OER Action Plan. *2nd World Open Educational Resources (OER) Congress*. Slovenia: UNESCO. Retrieved from https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ljubljana_oer_action_plan_2017.pdf
- Universities Australia (2008). *Advancing equity and participation in Australian Higher Education*. Canberra: Universities Australia.
- Universities Australia (2016). *Keep It Clever: Policy Statement 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/news/policy-papers/Keep-it-Clever--Policy-Statement-2016>
- Webb, G. (2003). Management of academic development. In S. Panda (Ed.), *Planning and Management in Distance Education* (pp. 87 - 97). London: Kogan Page.
- Wethington, E., & Dunifon, R. E. (2012). *Research for the public good. Applying the methods of translational research to improve human health and well-being*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Wills, S., Alexander, S., & Sadler, D. (2016). *Students, Universities & Open Education*. Sydney: Australia Australian Government Office for Learning & Teaching. Retrieved from <http://openedoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/OLT-Final-Report-Students-Universities-Open-Education.pdf>
- Zajda, J. (2013). Globalisation and neo-liberalism as educational policy in Australia. In H. Yolcu & D. Turner (Eds.), *Neoliberal educational reforms: a global analysis* (pp. 234-252). New York: Taylor & Francis.

