Modelling educational dialogue with employers around curricular employability in HE through OER

Antonio Martínez-Arboleda

University of Leeds
sllama@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract: Graduate-recruiting employers can take part in an educational dialogue with HE practitioners around employability-related OER in the area of Arts and Humanities. This engagement would add reputational value to OER and encourage more open content publication of quality materials. Giving non-educational users access to OER reviewing and endorsing activities can be a key component of a new agenda on OER sustainability which needs to include dissemination and showcasing of learning and teaching more firmly. This paper analyses the involvement of graduate recruiters in the existing review and endorsement mechanisms of OER in the HumBox repository from the perspective of its users, with reference to qualitative research and relevant literature on employability and OER. New concepts such as OER relevance attribution and commoditisation of reviews are discussed in the context of this new form of Open Practice. Therefore, this work is relevant to practitioners working either in Arts and Humanities, Employability or OER.

Keywords: collaboration, OER review, OER endorsement, relevance, relevance attribution, openness, sustainability, employer, employability, curricular employability, repositories, HumBox, employability, OER, OER showcasing, commoditisation of reviews, Open Practice

Introduction

This article is one of the outputs of the SCORE-funded project "Review and Endorsement of OER by Graduate-Recruiting Employers" in the HumBox repository, the JISC-funded UK repository for Arts and Humanities. The project ran between July 2011 and June 2012 and concentrated on the area of sustainability of OER. It explored engagement with OER by employers who offer general recruiting schemes for graduates, i.e. without regard to the specific subject studied.

The main objective of this paper is to model and discuss employer engagement in OER through existing reviewing and endorsement mechanisms in HumBox. This study deals with the perceptions and expectations of academic practitioners on this form of external OER engagement and develops its arguments through critical engagement with existing theories in the fields of OER and employability.

Further research in this area from the employers' perspective has been carried

out as part of this SCORE Fellowship with the intention of developing further this model for employer engagement in OER and describing a pattern of good practice. This will allow employers and other external partners to add extra value to existing OER, hence reinforcing our Communities of Practice and encouraging high-quality open content publication and re-use.

Methods

The 11 interviews that have been carried out with academic OER authors/contributors in Arts and Humanities in UK HE form the primary basis of the qualitative research for this article. The interviewees presented themselves as voluntary participants. The only requirement to participate in this study was to have proven experience in HumBox either as resource reviewer or as a user whose resources had been reviewed. An invitation by email to all known eligible participants was sent in October 2011 and an open invitation was sent through HumBox's mailing list. Additionally, an announcement was posted in HumBox's opening page. According to its project impact report (Borthwick, Howard and Millard, 2011), in February 2011 HumBox had around 450 users. At the time of the report, 429 comments had been posted on 341 OER, although according to the report the vast majority of them had been posted by the original HumBox team of reviewers of no more than 15 academics.

A semi-structured interview was used with participants to allow for some open discussion, and participants were presented with 16 questions in advance. It was aimed at gauging academics' attitudes and beliefs about curricular employability, OER review and endorsement, employer engagement in OER review and endorsement and repositories. The questionnaire is available as Appendix 1 to the Final Report of the author's SCORE project (Martínez-Arboleda, A, 2012). The interviews took place between November 2011 and February 2012. Most of them lasted around one hour and the responses varied greatly, despite the homogeneity of the sample. Further interviews with academics who submitted their OER for review by employers were carried out between January and March 2012. However, the research findings related to these will be discussed in future work, alongside the findings from subsequent research on employers' attitudes and expectations.

The choice of repositories with review and endorsement systems that are analysed in this article is based on the degree of sophistication of their review and endorsement mechanisms, their global appeal and their representativeness in relation to current strands of practice in the area of OER reviewing.

Contextualising employability and employer involvement in the curriculum

The growing demand for a greater commitment towards graduate employability is being met by universities through different channels. As part of their drive to improve the way they prepare graduates for the world of work, Higher Education Institutions offer a vast array of services to students and academic staff through University Careers Centres and employability officers based at faculty level, working, in the case of Arts and Humanities, primarily at co-curricular and extracurricular level.

At the other end of the employability spectrum, "curricular employability" has made its way through the already complex employability mapping. This strand of employability is delivered within the core academic curriculum. Consequently, academic subject specialists are required to take an active role in the provision of learning opportunities within their teaching programmes in which students can exercise employability-related undergraduate "practices". Curricular employability does not exclude the collaboration of Careers Centres staff and

employability officers, who can be instrumental in ensuring that employability is embedded and supported within the curriculum. However, in its less collaborative form of delivery, curricular employability is offered in educational settings in which the responsibility for determining and implementing the learning and assessment methodologies rests almost exclusively upon the subject specialists.

The lists of graduates' attributes and skills/competences in HE UK are already very detailed at the level of the degree programme and in many cases at a modular level. However, when academics have to develop learning activities in which employability can be appropriately embedded there is a noticeable lack of subject-based methodological direction. The effort required to reshape the learning methodology, and the resistance that this can generate, cannot be underestimated, particularly for those practitioners who are attached to the traditional menu of lecture, seminar, essay and exam and are highly pressurised by the institutional research agenda.

Additionally, there are strong arguments in favour of replacing the theoretical framework of employability constructed around "skills". Holmes (2001) defends a model of graduate employability, the practice-identity model, that does not include the concept of "skills" in the equation, although he and other authors in his line of thinking, including the author of this study, accept the use of the language of "skills" for practical purposes,

The skills agenda provides little help in understanding the complexity of post-graduation career trajectories, for it assumes that the process of gaining a job is simply a matter of matching skills required and skills possessed. (Holmes, 2001)

In Holmes' model, students who perform their "graduate identity" according to the employers' set of social practices successfully can be accepted into employment. However, and despite the great work based on Holmes' theory carried out by Hinchliffe and Jolly (2009), the role of the academic educator, who is being requested by her institution to support the process of graduate-identity shaping, has not been sufficiently explored in Holmes' model. One of the assumptions in the research introduced in this article is that employers have a vantage point over the itinerary of many of our graduates that most educators lack. Therefore, in order to offer HE students more enriching learning experiences, academics and employers must cultivate direct and focused educational dialogue. Otherwise, the academics' own identity, as facilitators of undergraduates' identity transition, can be easily disclaimed by students and even employers.

The HEA report edited by Tallantyre and Kettle (2011) shows the wide range of possibilities for successful employer contribution. The University of Reading's study (CCMS, 2009) on employer engagement includes direct employer involvement in the curriculum and shows the general benefits of this approach for students and institutions. In this context, the educational case for graduate-recruiting employer involvement in supporting the necessary process of methodological diversification is worth exploring.

Employer-academic dialogue on curricular employability in Arts and Humanities HE

The idea of curricular employability was discussed with academics who participated in the research informing this article during the course of the interviews which took place in the winter of 2011-2012. All respondents were in agreement that the academic curriculum is an ideal scenario for the humanistic and non-utilitarian integration of life skills, a wide category which includes

employability skills, into subject content. However, some also agreed that there are not sufficient exemplars of how to embed employability skills effectively in the curriculum in Arts and Humanities subjects. Another strand of opinion argues that the classic menu of essay, lecture, seminar and exam seems to be insufficient to deliver the humanistic education that students need in order to become more responsible citizens in the global and interconnected 21st Century society whilst developing key life skills, including competences for employment.

Meanwhile, many employers are currently in tune with inclusive and student-centred pedagogical thinking. For example, they defend that more team work and deep active learning is desirable in HE.

The contextualisation of subjects provides particular opportunities for skills development and reflection; team project work, case study analysis, assessment through presentation and research tasks are all established pedagogies that contribute to generic skills development whilst, in parallel, developing the mindset skills associated with the subject studied. (Wilson, 2012:32)

Participating academics agreed that there are no effective mechanisms for dialogue and feedback between authors of learning resources and graduate-recruiting employers, particularly in non-vocational subjects such as Arts and Humanities. The hypothesis of employers reviewing and endorsing learning resources published by subject specialists was put to the test with academics participating in this research. This form of Open Practice was conceived as part of a dialogue with employers and, therefore, academics were asked to express their views also about the different possibilities of interaction prior to the publication of the review or endorsement by the employer.

The question of what types of learning resources lend themselves to being the subject of review and endorsement on the basis of their employability value in Arts and Humanities was discussed. Since the skills' theoretical framework is still widely accepted by practitioners, the term "skills" was used in these conversations for practical reasons, although these can be referred to as specific traits of "graduate identity". The researcher specified three main possibilities:

1. Resources incorporating learning activities or assessment on subject-specific academic content whose methodology contributes to the development and promotion of identifiable employable skills and values (for instance, a seminar activity, a simulation or a presentation);
2. Resources focusing on the provision of subject-specific academic or cultural content that is also relevant for the acquisition of an identifiable employable skill or value (for instance, a video on intercultural communication);
3. Employability resources, designed to increase learners' awareness and self-reflection on their graduate identity (for instance, a student questionnaire about their learning experience and its relation to transferable skills or a handout on employability).

In general, the responses given by academics are a reflection of the tensions and the opportunities coexisting in a new scenario shaped by a perceived alignment of HE with the interests of industry and the new HE funding policies of the government. The question of instrumentalisation of universities, which for many should beware of becoming "training grounds for industry", appeared prominently in several cases in clear resonance with the opinions expressed by a Careers Services Director in the SCRE report (Lowden, Hall, Elliot and Lewin, 2011:22). However, for most of respondents the voice of employers should be heard in relation to curriculum-embedded employable competences in one way or another.

Some of the respondents indicated initially that employers may not be qualified to provide advice or express any judgement in relation to many of the learning resources that they may be presented with by the academic educator. Embedding skills acquisition in curricular content is a highly specialised professional task. For some other respondents this concern is easily overshadowed by the fact that the academic whose resource has been reviewed, or anyone else, can always rebuff the views expressed by the employer. However, other respondents remained unconvinced about the effectiveness of this sort of interaction. Curricular learning activities seem to form part of a package of content, values and skills that cannot be unbundled without great danger of altering its educational substance.

This leads us to the question of defining the professional boundaries between the academic educator and the employer. One respondent identified what could be considered a lowest common denominator formula that would allow employers to incorporate their views in the learning resource without assuming the role of the educationalist. The respondent suggested that

"[employers] can review the resource in relation to their usefulness for the world of work, or how far the resource contains elements which relate to transferable skills".

Two more questions remain to be discussed. Firstly, some fear, understandably, that some employers may have a bias against academic contents which question the current economic, social or political orders. Secondly, it would not be unthinkable to expect that employers' involvement would not be evenly distributed across all the academic subjects or topics. In both cases, the answer to these questions lies on promoting the involvement in education of a very diverse range of people and organisations. Students, charities, artists, public bodies and think-tanks should all be invited to social and educational spaces and given the opportunity to contribute with their views about learning and teaching in Higher Education in the same way as employers. In line with the cutting-edge work on student engagement in employability carried out by Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough (2009), for one of the academic respondents students are an essential part of this plural equation, alongside academics and employers, and OER are a highly effective vehicle for Open Practice:

"There has to be communication between academics who design the core curriculum and employers. And I think this is what OER can do because they are open. And if you've got students generating content, and publishing in an open source, what you can do is invite employers into that process in a much more explicit way".

Endorsements, comments and reviews of OER within repositories

Traditional peer-review mechanisms are seen by many as some form of uncomfortable baggage that OER have inherited from academic production. They are being contested and superseded by other forms of relevance and accreditation production such as users' comments, users' ratings and complex mechanisms such as the one operated by Slashdot. This website's review system relies on randomly selected users who have a track record of constructive and regular involvement in the website. The selected users are given the opportunity to "moderate" content in the comments section. Only users can be given the role of moderators and rank users' comments, and their participation is rewarded with "influence points".

The most sophisticated scheme proposed at the time of the writing of this article is the Learning Registry, which aims to filter and process all the information

available about each OER. The idea is to provide OER with sufficient scaffolding, helping users to judge their adequacy and suitability in relation to specific educational situations. For the purpose of this paper, the acronym RAUs, from Benkley's expression Relevance and Accreditation Utterances (2006), may be used when necessary hereafter.

The two repositories that have to be considered in order to contextualise the discussion around employers' reviews in HumBox are MERLOT and Connexions. These two highly influential and globally respected repositories offer access to content contributors beyond the universities where they are based. They possess two contrasting relevance and accreditation production systems for their resources. The critical comparison of these systems illustrates the dilemmas faced by other repositories and many practitioners around the world.

MERLOT is an extremely open repository. It allows anyone to open an account and showcase their work. Its overall social architecture seems very robust. There is a clearly established hierarchy of users. MERLOT accepts "comments" from every user, but the comments box requires users to provide key details about their user experience in relation to the resource they want to comment on. Consequently, users who read the comment can assess its relevance and reliability. However, "reviews" in this repository can only be posted by MERLOT-trained reviewers and carried out in accordance with MERLOT guidelines and procedures. This system is highly consistent with a regulated paradigm of education, according to which objectives, aims and methodology are subject to highly detailed prescriptions emanating from the subject-specialist tutors for auditing and transparency purposes. MERLOT's approach to reviewing is an important part of the identity of the repository and fits very well with the academic ethos and the spirit of the most demanding quality assurance mechanisms in education worldwide.

Connexions offers a different quality assurance approach from that of MERLOT. The article "Peer Review Anew: Three Principles and a Case Study in Post-publication Quality Assurance" (Kelty, Burrus and Baraniuk, 2008) presents the case for the "Lenses System", the reviewing and endorsement system of Connexions. As the authors summarise, the Lenses allow multiple contributors to highlight quality in each resource for different groups of users and for different contexts of use. The article defends the very post modern idea that OER should never be considered a final product. Quality becomes, using Bauman's expression (Bauman, 2000), "liquid". Wiley and Gurrell (2009) also discuss the idea of quality assurance, suggesting, in the same line of thinking, that assessing utility is more appropriate than assessing quality. They also introduce the idea that assessing the utility of the OER has to be done following active engagement with the resource as a user. This last point is not an issue in Connexions. In this repository, endorsement and reviewing by organisations is actually encouraged, despite the fact that they may not have used the resource themselves in any way.

The cases of Connexions and MERLOT have to be seen also in relation to repositories without mechanisms for the production of post-publication visible reviews, comments and endorsements. When content has been created exclusively within the organisation which runs the repository, these mechanisms do not appear to be a priority. The best example of this is MIT OCW, a "Closed/Open" repository, according to Boyer's dimensions (Cobo, 2011). Another interesting repository which does not have this type of mechanisms is JORUM UK, the institutional repository for the whole UK Higher and Further Education Sector. JORUM UK only allows users who are registered in UK HE and FE institutions to upload content. In the cases of repositories without comments/reviews, there is an assumption that educational institutions themselves are best placed to manage quality assurance. An interesting area for

future research is the type of user-segmentations in OER publication and circulation that may result from having different levels of openness for potential reviewers and endorsers.

Comments and collections in HumBox

As opposed to MERLOT and Connexions, HumBox presents itself as a subject community repository. It is aimed at practitioners and users in Arts and Humanities in UK Higher Education. However, interestingly, HumBox has unrestricted membership, as it allows anyone in the world to create an account, upload content and write comments. This repository has attracted learning objects of variable granularities and highly diverse content.

The two main possible ways to communicate relevance or accreditation within the HumBox repository in relation to its content are the comments box facility and the collections facility. The former is extremely straightforward and displays comments at the bottom of the resource page. The latter allows users to put together different HumBox resources under a certain description and title of the user's choice. Collections appear in searches in the same way as resources, but they are represented by a folder icon. This mechanism is relatively similar to the "Lenses" system in Connexions. In addition to this, a review of a resource could be created in the form of a resource itself and be linked to the reviewed resource internally, introducing a third category that has not been explored to date.

During the pre-launch stages of HumBox in 2009 and 2010, a process of peer-reviewing by subject specialists took place. The reviews were carried out according to guidelines elaborated by the project team. They concentrated on the educational potential and value of the resources and on usability, covering questions such as the software needed to use the files. Unlike MERLOT, the HumBox project did not envisage a permanent system of reviewing. The main bulk of reviews were posted in the comments box during the pre-launch stages of HumBox, (Borthwick, Howard, Millard, 2011). After the official launch of HumBox in 2010 the number of comments decreased dramatically. Interestingly, the number of content creators, resources and hits continued to grow steadily after the prime-pumping funds attached to the project had been spent, making HumBox one of the success stories of UKOER.

The quality assurance formulae and solutions proposed by Connexions and HumBox are more in tune with the new economic, cultural and educational paradigms described by Benkley (2006) and Wiley (2010) than those of MERLOT. Therefore the former may have a greater chance of becoming the preferred option for repositories that choose to have any form of post-publication quality assurance.

Opening OER review and endorsement to non-educational users

This research wanted to test whether the dialogue between academics and employers about case-based curricular employability can

- be articulated around OER;
- be hosted in open educational spaces such as the HumBox repository;
- contribute to improve the sustainability of OER

The involvement of employers in education through OER brings life to the latent contradiction between two of the key ingredients of the discourses underpinning open education. On the one hand the educational, economic, cultural and political discourse on social collaboration for the construction of knowledge

provides the intellectual support for a multilateral contribution to content creation, which could include employers. On the other hand, the need to resolve the asymmetries in education by delivering more free quality content provokes a knee-jerk apprehension about any profit-making organisations being involved in OER. The question of how effectively and promptly the free access agenda has to be implemented heightens this dilemma.

Collaboration from non-charitable and non-educational organisations can accelerate the expansion of the free access agenda. Downes (2006) and Wiley and Gurrell (2009) integrate into their work on OER sustainability different models of OER projects according to the way they are funded. MIT OCW (2011) is offering corporate sponsors, members of the "Next Decade Alliance" aggregations of material relevant to their customers or employees. The idea of private businesses showing social responsibility and contributing to free access education by giving some of their time, expertise or money to OER is certainly not alien to the OER movement. In the case of HumBox, the responses from the interviewees suggest that reviews, endorsement and comments by non-resource users, not only employers, can play a role in improving sustainability. Although the employers would not provide any funds as part of this initiative, they would contribute with their time and expertise and, crucially, they could encourage institutions to release more content as part of the institutions' profile-building activities. In contrast to the Next Decade Alliance initiative, the proposed employer engagement in HumBox entails an educational conversation for collaborative production of knowledge around specific OER.

The interviewees were questioned about the right of employers and employer groups to write comments in the resource pages of HumBox. The general sense is that as a matter of principle everybody is entitled to have a view on OER and share it. For some respondents, though, the legitimacy to write comments stems from having actually used the resource either as teachers or as learners. For this strand of respondents, the intended function of the comment box facility in HumBox is to allow users to facilitate reusability. Comments are seen as an intrinsic part of the process of construction of the user-generated scaffolding around the resource which provides context of use. The reasoning behind this viewpoint is that as learning resources are to be used in learning and teaching, any experiential encounter with them worth retelling must be connected to the purpose for which that the resource was designed. Otherwise, the person who writes the comment is not adding information to the resource that is relevant for other possible users.

One of the interviewees suggested that HumBox should have a comments system similar to the one in MERLOT. The key principle of the MERLOT system is that users who comment are required to give information about their experiential encounter with the resource. The MERLOT solution would certainly solve the objection to non-user reviews in a very pragmatic and elegant way.

However, the relative resistance to reviews written by users who have not used the resource for their learning or their teaching is not just a practical question that can be solved by improving the comments facilities of the repository. In our case, this discourse about reviewing is the tip of a theoretical iceberg that needs to be explored.

Critical Review of the 4 R's formulation

Looking at the work of Downes (2006) it can be argued that one of the reasons behind the exclusion of reviews from core OER activities is the increased centrality acquired by the concept of "reuse" in the OER movement. In response to the concerns over sustainability at a global scale,

what this means is that the functions of production and consumption need to be collapsed, that the distinction between producers and consumers need to be collapsed. The use of a learning resource, through adaptation and repurposing, becomes the production of another resource. Though there is a steady stream of new resources input into the network by volunteers, this represents, not the result of an OER sustainability project, but the beginning of it. (Downes, 2006:15)

This argument may help to explain why Wiley's 4 R's (Reuse, Redistribute, Revise, as in adapting, and Remix) (Wiley, 2010) do not include a 5th R, "Review and endorsement" or "Relevance Attribution", a term inspired by Benkler's "Relevance and Accreditation Utterances". The 4 R's conception of OER is an extremely valid proposition in the global context in which it was envisaged. This conception represents OER in motion, not as objects to be contemplated and discussed. It also helps to categorise the different levels of access granted by the CC licences. However, this formulation of the idea of OER production, which clearly emphasises the necessary dynamism of educational action, has to be slightly reshaped in our UK HE context at this time. Currently, institutions want to improve curricular employability, want closer engagement with employers and need to reinforce their learning and teaching reputation in the new UK HE financial scenario. This is particularly relevant in the case of non-vocational subjects such as Arts and Humanities.

Review and endorsement activities by non-educational users have to be included into some kind of category of OER-related usage for them to become the subject of further study. A distinction between "use of the resource" and "use of the repository" needs to be introduced at this point. Although anyone accessing the resource through the repository is using both the resource and the repository, not everyone making use of the repository is making use of resources. Many of the functions performed in repositories by their users are not motivated by a desire to use the resource for teaching, learning or cultural enjoyment purposes. For instance, including a biography in one's user profile or finding out whether one likes the learning materials of an academic working in the same filed cannot be regarded as "resource use", at least in the way suggested by some of the respondents. The same applies to the design and management of the architecture and the identity of the repository. Repository use is an extremely wide category.

Therefore, in our new sustainability scenario, the traditional OER functions need to be redefined in order to accommodate for the 5th R.
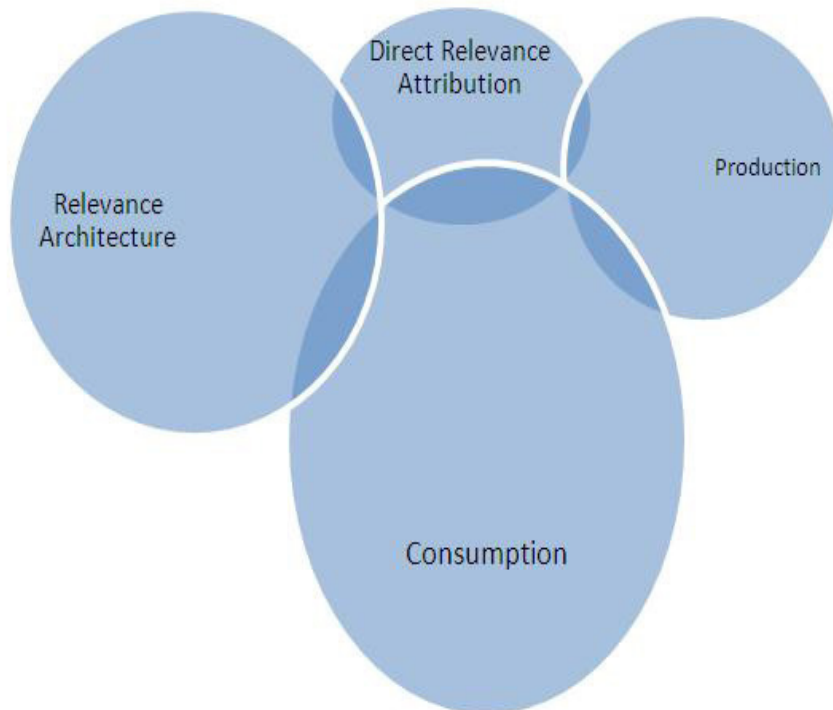
The "Direct Relevance Attribution" function of OER includes review and endorsement by both non-resource users and resource users alongside sharing, rating and uploading.

The "Direct Relevance Attribution" category can straddle the other three categories in the following way:

1. "Direct Relevance Attribution" is a function of "Relevance Architecture".
2. Production of the resource can include some type of description, which also contributes to "attributing relevance".
3. Data on use and reuse can be fed into "Direct Relevance Attribution" insofar as "Relevance Architecture" of the system allows it.

The links between production and consumption appear in the reuse function, whereas the links between consumption and relevance architecture refer to those individuals who make use of the Repository as a platform for relevance attribution, but not necessarily to make educational use of the resources themselves.

Figure 1: "Relevance Attribution" as an OER function

- Production: Creation, Revising and Remixing
- "Direct Relevance Attribution": uploading/sharing/reviewing/endorsing/rating/tagging
- "Relevance Architecture": Repository creation and maintenance/ building connectivity/Discoverability
- Consumption: Use & re-use

The reviewing process as Open Practice

If a dialogue between employers and academics is to be nurtured, the relational dimension of the reviewing and endorsement mechanisms may be even more important than the outcomes of the interaction themselves. Employers' engagement with authors prior to the publication of the review, or even before the write-up of the review, is one of the possibilities of collaborative production of reviews. In line with this reasoning, it was raised in the interviews that an employer may wish to ask if the academic is happy for her resources to be reviewed. Also, employers may wish to share a draft of their review with the academic concerned in private. For many respondents these are very likely scenarios. Even those respondents who defended that sharing content in a repository as open as HumBox involves accepting unannounced reviews recognised that employers may want to be courteous and cautious. This form of collaboration will be researched in detail when the review and endorsement process is piloted with employers. One possible outcome is that due to the novelty of this practice, employers may wish to play safe. In any case, as it can be seen in UKOER projects, the culture of sharing does only grow in parallel to the safe development of Open Practice, and this may be the case also in relation to reviewing and endorsement.

Two possibilities to be explored in the near future are the collaboration between academics and employers in finding relevant resources for their reviewing and also the writing of reviews jointly. This last point was discussed with the academics interviewed. Some form of partnership under which academics could collaborate with employers in the identification and review of resources was seen as good practice. Firstly, it would help employers to fill any expertise gaps that they may encounter and, secondly, it would provide employers with reassurance, as some of them may not feel comfortable in digital educational spaces.

One of the respondents presented an interesting objection to the collaboration in the process of reviewing when he argued that reviewers working for companies should be signing the reviews with their own names, rather than underwriting the review only with the name of the company they work for. This response shows that collaboration in writing reviews is a contentious issue in a "community" repository, using Foote's distinction (Foote, 2005 cited by Downes, 2006). In this type of digital space all individuals can have their voice heard without any kind of aggregation, filtering or syndication. It is difficult to imagine that the process of social and decentralised production of knowledge advanced by Benkley (2006) would work within the boundaries of a local and subject-based space driven by academics, no matter how inclusive it may be. Fortunately, HumBox has demonstrated that retaining the spirit of a pleasant neighbourhood where individuals matter, whilst being global in its appeal, is a feasible proposition though the resources and the people participating in HumBox are interconnected to the rest of the digital world. Inevitably and desirably a lot of the discussion and scaffolding around those resources will happen outside HumBox, as some of these OER will end up circulating in the open spaces of the "emergent" model, using Foote's terminology (Foote, 2005 cited by Downes, 2006).

Indeed, one of the situations that most interviewees were confronted with was the possibility of employers posting their comments about HumBox OER in other spaces, such as their own web pages. One of the examples suggested was an employer creating a section within their corporate web dedicated to social responsibility and a subsection dedicated to engagement in HE. In this subsection the employer would write comments or reviews about the resources in HumBox and create links to the resources within HumBox. In some other discussions with interviewees, the question of employers creating their own repositories was also raised.

These not so unlikely situations and the reactions of some of the respondents epitomise very well the challenges posed by the liquidity of our digital and post-modern world. The response given by one of the interviewees, who said that if employers were to publish their reviews and comments in their own webs they would "upset the balance", was unique in its formulation and nuances but not in its spirit. Respondents generally preferred educational matters to be discussed in educational spaces. For that particular respondent, there is a strong connection between the values of the repository and the rules of engagement. In her view HumBox is

'[…] quite democratic. And in that respect it's neutral. So what you've got is a neutral democratic space where everybody can share stuff. As soon as you start with the employer saying "no, we want to have this in our website", you are upsetting the balance of that, aren't you? You are giving them more power over the discussion.'

The range of possibilities for location of text-based RAUs is immense. A detailed taxonomy of the different possibilities and their implications for the users of the repository and the users of the resources could well be the subject of a separate

study. The dilemmas about the location of RAUs and their transportability are a representation, on a very small scale, of the current struggles of digital spaces to gain relevance and reputation and attract users.

Open Education in a market-based culture

There is a greater need to demonstrate to students and to the public that employability is well embedded in Higher Education. In line with this, respondents were asked to express their views about the possibility of institutions seeking positive public feedback from employers' on their learning and teaching for marketing and reputational purposes. They were also asked whether this could lead in the future to reviews and endorsements becoming the subject of trade with employers (commoditisation of reviews and endorsements).

Interviewees recognised the competition for RAUs as a possible outcome of employer involvement in reviewing and endorsement activities, but there does not seem to be a set of well-defined discourses on this question. One possible reason for this, as it became clear in some interviews, is that it is difficult to express concern or disagreement about this particular form of reputation-seeking behaviour without opening up the Pandora's Box of reputation-seeking through the whole field of Higher Education, particularly in a context of commercialisation of education. In any case, some of the qualms over the competition for RAUs apply to any sort of endorsement provided by anyone who has the trust and respect of the community, not only employers. Non-OER marketing activities around the quality of the learning and teaching and any other professional or institutional reputation-building activity would also have to be included in this discussion for OER Relevance Attribution to be in a level playing field. Therefore, whilst competition for reviews is perceived as a negative development, there is an assumption that this would be a natural, yet distant, development.

OER sharing culture is contributing to the transformation of the market-based production system, but the turning point of that change is still a long way ahead. Whether we like it or not, the growth of OER is not happening in a cultural vacuum because we live in an open world. Furthermore, the access of new participants to the open content production networks cannot be staggered at leisure to make it coincide harmoniously with the wishful expansion of the sharing cultural paradigm or "full OER conversion". The real challenge for the Open Education Movement is to secure the progressive expansion of open content social production by repurposing some of the existing market-based economic, cultural and political practices in parallel to the development of new practices based on the social production paradigm. For the OER movement to continue to make a difference in terms of human advancement Open Access needs to keep building a stronger critical mass in relation to restricted access. "Pricing" of outputs for the user is what should be kept out of the equation. The answer to any legitimate concerns about profit-making organisation involvement is not to limit their access but to foster the involvement of non-profit making individuals and organisations in OER production and relevance attribution. The more plural the movement, the greater are the chances of enduring success. Wiley's (2009) pragmatism over OER is the only way forward, as openness also means including other participants in the OER movement (Martínez-Arboleda, A., 2012).

Conclusion

In the networked open world in which we live, employer engagement in the curriculum through OER should be seen as an opportunity for academics in Arts and Humanities to extend their influence in society through the world of work,

and not as a way of surrendering their professional autonomy and identity. For academic practices and values to transcend academia more effectively academics need to be able to defend their pedagogical work through public dialogue with external partners such as employers. According to the model discussed in this article, this engagement can and should be carried out in the form of Open Practice and for it to be effective it needs to include other stakeholders and students. When designing their learning and teaching, academics can benefit from the employers' insights in order to navigate vicariously over the professional paths followed by graduates and gain a better understanding of the nature of the challenges that they face. The review and endorsement mechanisms explored can be appropriate for the type of Open Practice proposed. However, reviews and endorsements posted either inside or outside repositories, are just the tangible fruits of the relationship between employer and educator, which can be accessed and shared with others more readily.

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