

Trendspotter

Student-Driven Content

OERs open the door for students to take control of the learning process. By Mary Grush

The release of the iPad—and the subsequent flood of competing tablets onto the market—may finally kick-start the e-textbook revolution (see “Can Tech Transcend the Textbook?” on page 34). As publishers debate how to take advantage of these devices, it’s a good time to revisit the possibilities of open educational resources (OERs). **CT** asked Trent Batson, executive director of the Association for Authentic, Experiential, and Evidence-based Learning (AAEEBL), and MERLOT Executive Director Gerry Hanley for some updates.

CAMPUS TECHNOLOGY: What trends in OER should we be aware of today?

BATSON: [The important issue] is not that you have course content either in books or from other, web-based sources, but *who is doing the search* for the resource. Textbooks, in whatever form, are almost always assigned by the teacher, thereby robbing the student of an important learning exercise. But the activity of students searching for pertinent resources—particularly OERs—on the web is not scaffolded

so extensively, so it is more challenging and rewarding.

CT: By having students search for their own course materials, how are costs impacted?

HANLEY: In the California State University system, we’ve launched the Affordable Learning Solutions (AL\$) initiative (als.csuprojects.org), which provides both faculty and students with convenient tools for searching for OERs that can complement or substitute for publisher materials. When students can’t afford course materials, they don’t have to go without but can find relevant OERs with our OER Finder tool. Students type in the ISBN of a textbook and the finder generates a list of related OERs in the MERLOT and OER commons. We currently have over 1,500 open textbooks in the MERLOT collection as well.

On the AL\$ website, we’ve also included a section on how faculty can shift responsibility for course readings to students, by having them work with the campus reference librarians to research available library resources

as course materials. This relates to the point that Trent made about putting students in control of finding the resources for their learning.

Finally, we have a section on using open

source authoring tools to produce OERs—to support authoring both by students and by faculty. The AL\$ website is open for anyone to use.

CT: How else can student participation in the sourcing and creation of OERs change the education experience?

BATSON: The overarching question is not so much about open versus proprietary educational resources. Of course, the cost of educational resources is a very important factor. But the truth is that educational resources are no longer scarce but so bountiful as to be overwhelming. Therefore, the real issue is that the nature of work in our culture has changed.

College grads will, on average, change jobs every few years and therefore need to be self-directed learners. They must be prepared to operate in a non-scaffolded learning environment—real life. Students in college are no longer a captive market in terms of access to information and knowledge, since it is so bountiful. And, for their success in life, they can’t afford to be a captive.

By allowing students to employ OERs of their choice, in addition to resources from books—electronic or print—the CSU system is moving in the right direction, preparing students for the knowledge economy and the job realities of today. **CT**

Editor’s note: For more info on the related topic of e-portfolios, don’t miss this year’s AAEEBL World Portfolio Summit, co-located with Campus Technology 2011, July 25–28 in Boston.



HANLEY



BATSON