Where Are You on Your OER Journey?

This month we asked school librarians where they were in their OER (open education resources) journey. This was intended to get a clear picture of how well-understood and how well-implemented OER are in school libraries. The results show that we, as a profession, are still closer to the beginning of our journey in using OER effectively. Over half of our respondents disclosed that they were largely unfamiliar with what is meant by the term OER. Another 20% have heard of OER, but haven't considered their application in a school library setting. Twelve percent reported knowing that other teachers in their building are using them, and 15% said they use them in their own instruction and assist teachers in finding and utilizing them. Only 1% of respondents claimed to be actively contributing to the creation of OER.

These results show that we have some progress to make before we are all in a place where we feel comfortable really talking about OER. Though they aren't that new, it might be tempting to dismiss them as a passing fad--a tech tool that we don't have the energy to explore. Here's why we can't do that. OER aren't a single resource that can be ignored. OER are "teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge" (Hewlett Foundation, 2019).

School librarians have several reasons to champion OER. Open education promotes access and equity. They can be used in schools without proper funding. They can give schools a way to stretch their textbook and instructional resource dollars. Using OER models the ethical use of information and can prompt discussion and a greater understanding of copyright and licensing.

How do you become an OER resource in your school?

1. Examine the current educational resource needs of your teachers and students. Depending on the organizational structure of your school this may involve joining curriculum committees, site-based decision-making councils, departmental meetings, or forming an OER exploratory workgroup.

2. Explore current OER collections, articles, podcasts, developments, etc.

3. Build curated and focused collections of open educational resources and incorporate them into your existing EdHubHUbs.

4. Make sure that you are part of the curriculum conversation, especially at the beginning of the year or during professional development for new teachers.

5. Develop goals to create original OER content to meet the specific needs of your teachers and students. Be a resource to teachers who may need help finding resources to embed in their OER, with a specific focus on fair use, copyright, and respect of intellectual property.

While this may be a new concept to some of us, we can take comfort in knowing we are already using OER resources to some degree or another, perhaps without knowing they fall under this name. For example, every librarian loves when we can refer someone to Project Gutenberg for access to literature that has been made available online for free because it has become part of the public domain. Project Gutenberg is a wonderful OER for literature. But what about when it's time to purchase textbooks? As the school librarian, it may be worth your time to claim a seat at the table as decisions are made.

It would be naive to say that the current OER situation is perfect and easy. Remember, over half of our respondents weren't even sure they knew what it stood for. A quick online search for OER repositories will reveal both quality materials and uninspiring content. However, it would also be naive to say that OER isn't something that concerns us. Of course we are interested in open access to resources that improve the learning in our schools. By noting high-quality offerings now, and sharing them with teachers as we find appropriate, we will be poised to positively impact our stakeholders when the need arises.

If you are new to OER, or just need a place to start, this collection of links will help give you a foundational understanding.

ISTE Open Education Resources — https://www.iste.org/learn/open-educational-resources

EdSurge Podcast: "As OER Grows Up, Advocates Stress More Than Just Low Cost," by Jeffrey R. Young and Sydney Johnson — https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-01-15-as-oer-grows-up-advocates-stress-more-than-just-low-cost

New America. Start Your OER Search and Discovery — https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/prek12-oer-in-practice/resources-get-started/

Edutopia. "The Uncertain Future of OER" by Tom Berger — https://www.edutopia.org/article/uncertain-future-oer

Work Cited

"Open Educational Resources." Hewlett Foundation. https://hewlett.org/strategy/open-educational-resources/. Accessed December 2019.

About the Authors

Jen Gilbert, MSLIS, is a K-12 teacher librarian at Eminence Independent Schools in Eminence, KY and part-time faculty at the University of Kentucky. She earned her bachelor's in English teaching from Brigham Young University and her master's in library and information science from the University of Kentucky.

Jen loves spending her days in her school library, the EDhub, and promises a VIP tour to any fellow school librarians who want to check out the EDhub's impressive makerspace.

James Allen is Statewide School Library Lead and a digital learning coach for the Kentucky Department of Education. Previously, he was teacher librarian and EDhub Director at Eminence Independent, a K–12 public school in Kentucky. He is an organizer and regular moderator of #KyLChat, which gives librarians across Kentucky a place to share and explore new ideas. He is also a co-founder of the #KyGoPlay movement, which is changing the way people think about libraries,

makerspaces, and play in school. James is a Google for Education Certified Innovator. He is also a past president of the Kentucky Association of School Librarians.

MLA Citation

Allen, James, and Jennifer Gilbert. "Where Are You on Your OER Journey?" *School Library Connection*, December 2019, schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Survey/2231896.

https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Survey/2231896?topicCenterId=1955261
Entry ID: 2231896