Learning from the past: Development of open and distance education research over time

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How has open and distance education research developed over time?
Why?

1) To provide valuable insights for current researchers and practitioners.
2) To address our observation that research and activities are based on work starting much earlier (1960s onward) yet there is a low level of awareness, attribution and connection to current scholarship.
3) To apply network citation analysis techniques to yield new insights on connections, patterns, biases within the literature.
People come to open ed from many disciplines
Methods

Based on network citation analysis (Wasserman and Faust 1994) and developed by others.

An initial sample of 20 articles was selected based on the following search: ("open education", "open learning", openness)AND(history,definition)).

- References were extracted from each article into a spreadsheet listing ‘source’ and ‘target’ items. Duplicates were removed.
- CSV files were imported into Gephi for network analysis (Bastian, Heymann & Jacomy, 2009).
- A further iteration was made of references that were cited at least by two of the original articles.
- Final network = 5,217 references from 172 articles (also depending on open accessibility).
Number of articles retrieved over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Numbers of articles retrieved</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-74</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-79</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1985-89</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990-94</td>
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<td>2005-09</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010-15</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Open Ed in classrooms

• Earliest cluster present
• Plowden report (1967), a comprehensive review of primary school provision
• Popular in America
• ‘open’ can relate both to the physical layout of classroom spaces, and approaches to designing educational tasks.
Distance Ed

• From 1980 onwards
• Phenomenon of open and distance universities.
• From the mid 1980s, the term ‘open learning’ becomes more prominent, signalling a shift towards learner-centred pedagogy and removing barriers.
• Towards the end of the decade, technological focus comes to fore.
• These last 2 lay some of the groundwork for the subsequent theme of ‘E-learning and online education’.
E-learning

• Prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s,
• Bridges the gap between distance education and OER.
• Mainstreaming of many of the issues of open ed, for other HEIs
• E-learning becomes increasingly synonymous with the Internet and web-based technologies,
• Interest in new or adapted pedagogy
Open access publishing

• Towards the end of the 1990s,
• Focus on metrics and how OA compares to traditional scholarly publishing during the 2000s.
• This cluster is not primarily concerned with teaching, but rather focused on the research activities
• Not widely linked to the other themes in the network, but has been an important contributor towards open practices in terms of digital scholarship.
OER

• Emerges around the year 2000, initially focusing upon learning objects, open source education, and OpenCourseWare.

• The theme is central to the citation network, drawing upon existing work in e-learning and distance education, and influencing subsequent themes of MOOCs.

• Shift from just resource to be combined with open educational practices emerges.
Social media use

• From the mid 2000s.
• Written from a more general Internet Studies or Communication perspective but the position of the theme suggests that this body of work has been influential in thinking about open practices and scholarly activities online.
• Also includes ideas related to ‘Web 2.0’ and social media more broadly, such as blogging.
• In very recent years, shifted towards use of tools as part of Open practices.
MOOCs

• One of the most recent themes within the network.
• Although ‘open’ is ostensibly foregrounded, being part of the acronym itself, the relationship with the discourse surrounding openness in education is less clear.
• The group of papers on the theme of MOOCs have some shared connections to the OER and e-learning clusters, but are distinct.
• One of the most recent and ongoing
• Its location within the network shows how it sits at the intersection of social media, open access publishing, and OER.
• It includes articles focused upon digital scholarly practices, and open educational practices, spanning both the research and teaching remits of higher education.
Timeline view

http://tinyurl.com/gogn-timeline
Issues

• Does this create a ‘canon’?
• Does that privilege certain voices?
• Can we use the method to seed related topics?
• Are there complementary methods?
Limitations

- Based on seeding & citations
- Lag in publication
- Bias toward digitized resources
- Demonstrates “Matthew Effect”
- Relies on further referencing
- Groupings are subjective and not always distinct
Conclusions

• Interesting approach for gaining a historical perspective of a field of research.

• Highlights the idea that the scholarly community needs to conduct more robust and thorough research to draw upon previous publications, and to fully attribute prior scholarly work.
Discussion

Questions

• Connections between communities and those that are poorly connected (e.g. open education in schools, distance education and open learning).
• Identifying biases and gaps, e.g. gender, geography
• Converting this into useful tool – limitations, possibilities
• Others?
Links

OpenPraxis: http://dx.doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.10.2.822

Network view: http://tinyurl.com/gogn-network
Timeline view: http://tinyurl.com/gogn-timeline