Voices for OPENNESS in LANGUAGE Learning

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Introduction

We are a world-wide community of collaborators—forward-thinking students, educators, content developers, and technologists carrying the banner of Open Education in language learning.

From first-time Yoruba language student to the editor of a world languages website, we are people who are excited about Open Educational Resources (OER). These web-based learning materials, which can be accessed freely by the public, are the building blocks of the Open Education movement.

It is an exciting time in language education—collaboration has never been easier because OER allow any individual to contribute ideas, expertise, and experience.

Please read our stories and consider adding your own voice!

Visit http://sites.la.utexas.edu/voices to view the web version of *Voices for Openness in Language Learning* or to print out the pdf version. Click on "Add Your Voice" to access the submission form for your story and photo.

About COERLL

Voices for Openness in Language Learning is a professional development project from the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning (COERLL), one of 15 national foreign language resource centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education (Title VI of the 1990 Higher Education Act).

We at COERLL have diverse interests including the fine arts, foreign language pedagogy, information design, and sociolinguistics. Together we are committed to working as a team toward a more open world. In language education, this means providing equal learning opportunities for the public by providing Open Education Resources (OER), freely accessible web-based resources.

We thank each of our Voices for Openness contributors who spoke out about using OER to improve language learning and how we can work together to promote the ideals of Open Education. We hope these voices will inspire and incite even more sharing and collaboration.

If you are interested in getting involved in one of COERLL's projects, we'd love to hear from you.

Sincerely,
COERLL Staff
info@coerll.utexas.edu
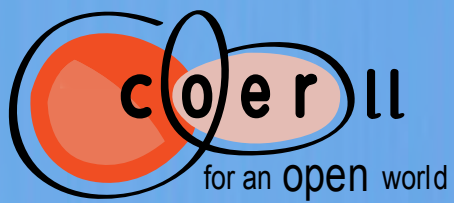www.coerll.utexas.edu

Wen-Hua Teng

Senior lecturer and creator of Gateway to Chinese, interactive learning portal, University of Texas at Austin

Self-described low-tech educator develops a series of Chinese language learning websites.

I used to be so afraid of touching anything with technology—always a pen and paper type of person. This all changed for me when I was awarded UT Austin's LAITS (Liberal Arts Information Technology Services) grant in 2010. I partnered with their technology team for my first online project; then I joined the team at COERLL. I brought forward my ideas for educational resources, and together we created them for the public.

First, I saw a need for interactive listening comprehension exercises for beginning Chinese language learners. In teaching and learning the Chinese language, there are very few meaningful exercises for beginners, especially in listening. Publishers mainly produce inauthentic language recordings for textbooks. That kind of input is not very helpful. And also listening is something that is hard to teach in the classroom. It takes practice, so students must use outside class time for that. But where are these kinds of audio materials?

"I used to feel that technology was something I didn't want to touch, but ... We need to keep up with technology and work together with our students."

I thought of creating a website (*Chinese Take-In*, http://laits.utexas.edu/chinese_take_in/), so that students could practice at home. The biggest advantage of technology when it comes to language teaching is that so much can take place outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, some of the technology can be very expensive and not very helpful.

We conceived of *Chinese Take-In* as an open educational resource, pub-lished online with a Creative Commons license. It was very well received by the public, and because the materials are open and available online, I've gotten feedback from people I don't even know. Good feedback—how it has really helped them. I recently got an email from someone from the University of Zurich!

Because my students and the public responded so enthusiastically to *Chinese Take-In,* I began another online project called *Pitch-Perfect Pinyin*, a beginning pronunciation website. Pronunciation is the very first step of learning because Chinese is a tonal language. It should be a part of any curriculum for beginners, but there are just no resources out there. There are some Pinyin websites, but nothing very extensive and nothing that includes interactive exercises.

The commercial textbook our department adopted came with a CD. Together it cost a couple hundred dollars, but there were only a few isolated sounds for pronunciation practice. That's it. *Pitch Perfect Pinyin* will have five types of exercises and 500 interactive items. There are also hundreds of simpler items where you just click, listen, click, listen.

I used to feel that technology was something I didn't want to touch, but every student has a smart phone; many have tablets. We need to keep up with technology and work together with our students.

The Gateway to Chinese web portal, which includes Chinese Take-In, Pitch Perfect Pinyin, and other language resources, can be accessed at http://sites.la.utexas.edu/chinese/.
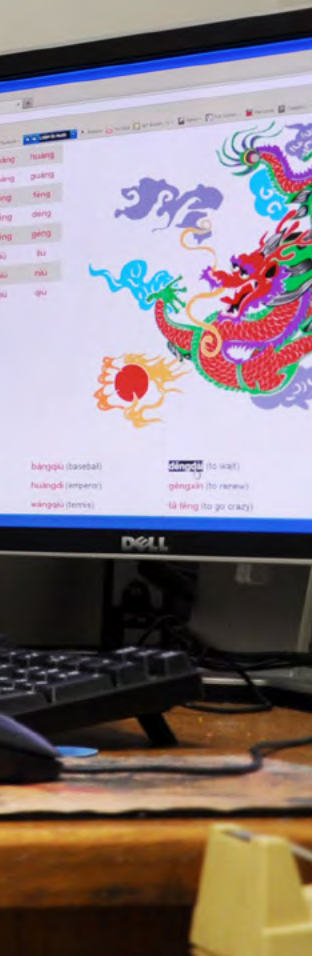
Almeida Jacqueline Toribio
Barbara E. Bullock

Program Directors of Spanish in Texas online video corpus, UT Austin

Creating a linguistic landscape of Spanish speakers in the U.S., starting in Texas.

From an August 2011 interview with COERLL:

BEB: We see Spanish speakers as one of Texas' biggest resources. It's not oil. It's people! And it's the language! Unfortunately, Texas Spanish speakers have internalized the notion that their language is somehow corrupted. And they are criticized from both sides. They get it from people who compare them unfavorably to second language learners in the classroom here in the U.S. But they also get it from the other side of the border. This constant criticism makes many speakers shift away from bilingualism, from Spanish.

"Texas Spanish speakers have internalized the notion that their language is somehow corrupted."

AJT: Texas Spanish is not in any way deficient, merely different. An important part of our work is to document Texas Spanish as it is, to present the language that students will be exposed to in their communities. The interest has been enormous, and it comes from all corners. We have been contacted by elementary and high school teachers from small towns across the country who are looking for authentic language materials. There is interest from researchers who are examining heritage speakers of Spanish for comparisons to second language learners.

It is tremendously important for the *Spanish in Texas* resource to be open and available for a low cost to the general public because of the population whose speech we're documenting and the students we are hoping will benefit from the materials. These students often view standard Spanish textbooks as foreign language textbooks that don't reflect the Spanish they actually speak.

BEB: We have an opportunity to put something on the web that does match what they know about their language, which ought to invoke and enhance their literacy skills because they are learning to read in the language that they actually do speak and not one that's reflective of a foreign standard. And we can change the materials or add to them if they don't work. We can get input from our users. Ultimately, with continued funding from the government, we can make a great deliverable, an open textbook for heritage Spanish speakers. There are a few on the market now, but they are very expensive and none is ideal.

"An important part of our work is to document Texas Spanish as it is ..."

ATJ: We have noticed that many researchers hoard their data. We've encountered a few fairly senior researchers who are probably going to die before they share their data! And we don't believe in that. Since we're making the effort to collect the language samples, we'd like them to be used.

Access Spanish in Texas at http://sites.la.utexas.edu/spanishtx/.

Georges Detiveaux

French Professor and OER advocate, Lone Star College-CyFair

A French professor reinvents his community college classroom using OER.

I was using OER long before I knew they were OER! Exploring the wealth of online educational resources has been a great source of professional development for me, forcing me to consider each new resource in the context of how beneficial it will be to the course outcomes and the goals of my learners. I have cultivated an entrepreneurial "can-do" spirit.

I started small, gradually incorporating OER into courses. I would assign OER as additional work, use web exercises in the labs, or use OER for in-class supplements when a section of a publisher-sponsored text didn't help impart the concept at hand. Eventually, after a couple of semesters of finding OER for everything my learners needed, I took the plunge and eliminated the publisher-sponsored text altogether.

Now, thanks to OER, several other online sites, and a lab full of language learning software that I didn't previously know what to do with, I have a completely redesigned course—not so much in content, but in the way my learners access and interact with their course materials. I have even been able to change the format of the course, which began as a fully in-person five hour per week class. Now it is a hybrid class where we meet in person for three hours a week and the students do two hours a week in the lab.

Face to face hours are spent focusing on speaking and listening, actually using the language, as opposed to talking about it. I am definitely seeing a difference in speaking proficiency levels.

Thanks to my exploration of OER, I have been able to grow as an educator and create my own universe of teaching that is truly customized to my learners' needs. One of these resources I have had the pleasure to come to know very well is *Français interactif*, a complete first-year French program available for free online from the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning (COERLL).

I have established connections at UT-Austin and other institutions where *Français interactif* is being used. We are a community of users who collaborate to improve this OER and share best practices. The text boasts a forum for instructors all over the world to share resources and a Facebook presence of thousands of student users. This multi-modal program offers all that one would expect from a French method produced by a for-profit publishing company, including online exercises with excellent grammar presentations, audio and video resources, downloadable chapters that have been polished by content experts, a test bank, sample syllabi, and supplementary exercises as well.

"Thanks to my exploration of OER, I have been able to grow as an educator and create my own universe of teaching that is truly customized to my learners' needs."

What's more, as an instructor in a Texas community college where many of my students aspire to transfer to the University of Texas, we are lucky to find in the "characters" of the textbook actual UT students who are not too far ahead of my own students in their learning paths, providing them authentic learning material which they can relate to.

Access Français interactif at:
http://laits.utexas.edu/fi
http://www.facebook.com/francais.inter-actif.

Fehintola Mosadomi

Assistant professor and creator of *Yorùbá Yé Mi*,
first open access Yoruba textbook, UT Austin.

OER pioneer for less commonly taught languages.

At first, it was not clear to me what "open access" meant. I had to research the implications of this new form of publishing, particularly with the multimedia aspect (foreign language text along with its audio files). I was not sure what types of rights I would be giving up. As time went by, I decided that making Yoruba language and culture available at little or no price to the wider world, not just to my students, gave learning a higher meaning.

Open access—as it relates to foreign language publishing—is both an educational and cultural shift. Not only can users (learners) download a foreign language teaching material freely, they can also print and bind the hard copy as some of my students have chosen to do. They can copy or share the materials with fellow students and other people. As a pioneering effort, African language and less commonly taught language (LCTL) learning material, such as *Yorúbà Ye Mí*, benefit from publishing through open access.

"Open access publishing with public funding goes a long way to alleviate the cost of publishing on the part of the author and the publisher. It also allows for the materials to be more widely distributed."

The goal is to bring Yoruba to the level of French, German, and Spanish. We are really not that far because of programs like *Yorúbà Ye Mí* that incorporate technology, such as QR codes and multimedia, to enhance learning. Other programs out there are much more expensive. And there are no other OER in the Yoruba language. Open textbooks will help to promote the language and the culture. Open access publishing with public funding goes a long way to alleviate the cost of publishing on the part of the author and the publisher. It also allows for the materials to be more widely distributed.

The Yoruba community at UT Austin recorded the audio files on the website; these were enrolled and former graduate students, my Fulbright teaching assistants, and myself. This collaboration was an integral part of the textbook. Initially, the audio files were meant to help learners with pronunciation, particularly because of the so-called "mythically difficult Yoruba tones." Providing the audio files, with the use of QR codes, has yielded great results. Students enjoyed the tongue twisters so much that they turned them into a fun and musical project. Then they made a mini drama from these with the help of my TAs. These are available on YouTube, along with some of the songs provided in the textbook.

Another student made a video of the use of prepositions, his end of semester technology project, and placed it on YouTube. In addition, for extra credit, my students helped me edit the original version of the textbook. They did a good job. When students can exhibit their knowledge of the material phonologically, semantically, or grammar wise, this makes learning even more fun! It has made the students more assertive and better learners.

Yorúbà Ye Mí can be accessed at http://coerll.utexas.edu/yemi/.

Find the Yoruba videos by searching for "UT Yoruba" on YouTube.

Amy Rossomondo and Jonathan Perkins

Co-creators of *Acceso*, an online curriculum for intermediate-level Spanish, University of Kansas

Creating a bridge between the diverse Spanish-speaking regions around the world.

Acceso grew out of a desire to create a curriculum that helps develop trans-cultural and translingual competence, specifically one that helps students to understand the diversity of cultures within the Spanish-speaking world and the growing importance of Spanish in the United States. The project is a collaborative effort between the University of Kansas's Spanish Basic Language Program and the Ermal Garinger Academic Resource Center, which provides technical and logistical support, as well as graduate student training in the use of technology in the classroom.

"Envisioning *Acceso* as a web-based OER allows us to create a curriculum that leverages the multimedia and interactivity of the web..."

Choosing to make our materials open access may be the most important decision we have made about the *Acceso* project. It has freed us up to think in very different ways about language learning and teaching.

Envisioning *Acceso* as a web-based OER allows us to create a curriculum that leverages the multimedia and interactivity of the web, that evolves to keep pace with current events, and that responds to student input. The platform not only saves our students the expense of purchasing a textbook, but also fosters engaged learning by a generation of students that is accustomed to accessing information digitally and to using participatory social media.

As a second stream of instruction, the *Acceso* project provides a venue for hands-on graduate student training in both materials creation and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

Having complete control over an OER platform gives us an opportunity to create the first generation of born digital instructors, allowing them to use the tools they will need for language teaching in the 21st century. Empowering graduate students to use authentic web-based content allows us to create a well-rounded curriculum, one in which disparate voices speak for themselves about controversial topics. The collaborative nature of the OER also gives the instructors a sense of ownership over a curriculum that they themselves are creating.

Perhaps most importantly, the OER platform allows us to extend our conversation about language learning and teaching beyond the University of Kansas. Language instructors can choose to implement the entire curriculum, or to use individual modules as supplements to existing curricula without the need to justify additional expenses. As word of *Acceso* spreads, we are hopeful that its collaborative nature encourages instructors from around the globe to contribute content and help us to refine existing modules.

"Choosing to make our materials open access may be the most important decision that we have made about the *Acceso* project."

Acceso is available at http://www2.ku.edu/~spanish/acceso/ .

Carl Blyth

Director of COERLL and Professor of French,
UT Austin

Open education proponent inspires others toward innovating and improving language education.

Like many foreign language teachers, my interest in creating and sharing pedagogical materials grew out of my frustration with commercial textbooks. I knew from my own experience living in France that the French language came in a variety of dialects and registers, so why did everyone in the instructional materials seem to speak the same bookish French? I came to realize that we would need to create our own materials in order to capture the actual process of learning a language and to send the right messages to our students: (1) you learn a language by using the language; and (2) you don't have to speak flawlessly to communicate, so lighten up.

Armed with video cameras, my colleagues and I set out to document the experiences of our study abroad students as they sought to communicate in France. Our efforts resulted in *Tex's French Grammar* (http://laits.utexas.edu/tex) and *Français interactif* (http://laits.utexas.edu/fi), two online resources that broke a lot of unwritten rules for pedagogical materials. In 2004, we made both resources available to the Internet public and were astounded by how quickly their popularity spread. We had produced Open Educational Resources (OER) without even knowing what OER meant!

I first heard the acronym "OER" a few years later while watching a TED talk with the provocative title, "Goodbye textbooks; Hello open source learning." The speaker, Richard Baraniuk, professor of computer engineering at Rice University and a leading figure in the Open Education movement, painted a compelling vision: an educational ecosystem where knowledge was free and open to use and re-use and where educators shared their ideas and materials with each other.

Not everyone is convinced, however. Surveys indicate that teachers remain wary about the quality and authority of OER, and rightly so. Significant educational changes should be met with healthy skepticism. At COERLL, all materials are developed by experts in their foreign language. Moreover, the developmental pro-

cess includes multiple cycles of classroom testing and revision. And since COERLL products are free to the public, teachers or students can examine their contents fully before using them.

Fortunately, there are many professional organizations concerned with vetting OER such as *OER Commons* (http://www.oer-commons.org), *Community College Open Textbook Collaborative (http://www.collegeopentextbooks.org)*, and *WikiEducator (http://www.wikieducator.org)*. Another good example is *Multimedia Educational Resource of Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT)*, an online community of faculty and instructional technologists (http://www.merlot.org). Many COERLL materials have been thoroughly reviewed by the *MERLOT* editorial board. Moreover, because organizations such as *MERLOT* or *WikiEducator* have no vested interest in the product under review and employ actual teachers, the evaluations tend to be very practical and well-informed.

"If you are a foreign language teacher frustrated by some aspect of commercial textbooks ... I encourage you to learn more about OER."

If you are a foreign language teacher frustrated by some aspect of commercial textbooks—their rising cost, their reliance on inauthentic language, their lack of appropriate role models for language learning—I encourage you to learn more about OER. A good place to start is the Department of Education's National Foreign Language Resource Centers portal where you will find a trove of free foreign language materials (*http://nflrc.msu.edu/lrcs.php/*).

To access COERLL resources, visit: http://www.coerll.utexas.edu/coerll/.

Nicola Mabbott

EFL teacher and foreign language learner

How I benefited from and contributed to foreign language OER.

I teach English as a Foreign Language in northern Italy during the academic year, and during the summer I teach English for Academic Purposes at the universities in my hometown, Nottingham (UK). I am fascinated by languages and am currently trying to acquire two new ones—German and Swedish. I hope that eventually I will be able to use these two languages in my career.

Living, as I do, in a village tends to limit possibilities for attending language classes. So last year, when we finally managed to set up a broadband connection (a long story!), I decided to investigate the possibilities of using the Internet to refresh my rusty knowledge of the languages I had studied and to acquire new ones.

I started with a German course for beginners on the BBC website and a website called *Leicht Deutsch Lernen*, as well as Catalan and Spanish TV programmes. Then, one day I had the idea of trying to find a course in Portuguese for people like me who could already speak Spanish. That was the day I discovered *Tá Falado* (one of the resources offered on COERLL's *Brazilpod*, a website of Portuguese language learning materials). I was an instant fan!

As I walk a lot during the summer, I downloaded the *Tá Falado* lessons onto my MP3 player and listened to them whilst walking. It was refreshing to find such knowledgeable people talking in a very friendly, unassuming and unpretentious way. From *Tá Falado* I went on to *Conversa Brasileira*. I found this project very useful, because the greatest difficulty for me with Portuguese is understanding native speakers chatting at natural speed. The videos also provide an invaluable insight into Brazilian culture, which is fascinating and also makes learning Portuguese more interesting.

Being a writer of teaching materials for the English language for about ten years now, and being inspired by the *Brazilpod* projects, I suppose it was only natural that I started to experiment with writing materials for students of Portuguese. I didn't know how they'd turn out, but I thought if they were successful, and if I could help people get even more out of *Brazilpod*, that would be fantastic!

My role has changed considerably—before I was only a learner, and now I am also helping others to learn. However, I believe that there is always something new to learn, and writing these materials is giving me plenty of opportunities to do so.

Although I had published online before, I knew nothing about publishing content with an open license. I believe that publishing open materials encourages other people to learn, and as I am a teacher myself, I think this must be a good thing! Contributors have the opportunity to explore their creative side, and I personally have gained a whole new wealth of knowledge too.

"I believe that publishing open materials encourages other people to learn, and as I am a teacher myself, I think this must be a good thing!"

Tá Falado and *Conversa Brasileira* can be accessed at http://coerll.utexas.edu/brazilpod/.

Anke Sanders

Doctoral candidate in Educational Psychology and Graduate Assistant Instructor of German, UT Austin

A call for more people to get involved in creating OER for language education.

My research interests include humor, motivation, and instructional theories, as well as material and curriculum design, focusing on language learning and the development of the language learner's motivational self. I'm interested in the use and effects of teacher self-disclosure in language learning environments. While I enjoy research, I am most engaged in the classroom, working closely with my students.

The term OER is really new to me, even though I was probably involved in using them and later creating them for a much longer time. Retrospectively, I would say I have been a user of OER for 20 years or so. When I was in high school I always tried to find free educational resources online to prepare and study for big upcoming exams. When I worked at Mt. Holyoke College later, I was fascinated by the way my mentors taught: engaging the students and realizing innovative ideas. Not only did I get inspired to create my own material, I also built my first personal website which provided information and material for German students at the college.

I never thought I would enjoy teaching. Through the work with my mentors I was introduced to Dr. Zsuzsanna Abrams and her German language projects: *Deutsch im Blick* (DiB), a first year German textbook, and *Grimm Grammar*, an online grammar tool. These were open resources with a Creative Commons (CC) license.

I found the project original, authentic, and cool. After my first year working with Dr. Abrams I was thrilled when she asked me to actively work on its content, which meant not only to edit, collect realia, and design new exercises, but to actually apply what I had learned and share it freely with my German language students.

I think it is important to educate users about open licensed material. As an instructor I have found it dissatisfying if a picture or a file that was used to create a great exercise has to be taken out of a lesson because we cannot acquire rights or permission to use website content. Also, some exercises become useless if content has been taken off the web or its URL changes.

I hope that promoting and speaking for the general utility and value of open educational resources can help open up more venues and ways of realizing issues, such as integrating music videos and other culturally valuable material. Ideally, developers will find a way to communicate and cooperate in a more transparent yet secure form with the different user groups (teachers, students, administrators).

As of now there is no way for us to share testing and evaluation material. Assessment should only be available for teachers, and I am not aware of an open and free platform that would allow such cooperation and sharing. I hope folks knowledgeable in how to realize this will soon step forward, so that projects like DiB (and its various users) can benefit from an even greater collaborative community and successful learning outcome.

"I hope that promoting and speaking for the general utility and value of open educational resources can help open up more venues ..."

Access DiB at http://coerll.utexas.edu/dib/ and Grimm Grammar at http://coerll.utexas.edu/gg/.

Fernando Rosell-Aguilar

Lecturer in Spanish and coordinator of iTunes U content for the Department of Languages at the Open University, UK.

iTunes U as a distribution platform for open language resources.

When in 2006 I transferred one of the video clips I was developing for a Spanish course at the Open University (www.open.ac.uk/) to my iPod, I immediately noticed that the video had suddenly become much more appealing than when I watched it on my TV screen. The reduction in size didn't seem to matter, what struck me was that the learning materials fit on the device I carried in my pocket all the time. I could watch however many times I liked, wherever, whenever.

"Despite the fact that language materials only represent about 10% of the content that the Open University provides on iTunes U, they account for almost a third of all downloads, making languages the most successful among its resources."

The next step was to figure out how to deliver the resources from my course to my students and—why not?—to anyone else who may want to learn from them. The answer to the latter was iTunes U. Apple launched iTunes U in 2007 to disseminate educational content provided by universities, initially only from the USA and Canada. Since then, it has opened up to other educational institutions and countries. The vast majority of the content is freely available to the general public. In many instances, providers retain copyright of the materials they offer. In that sense those materials only fit partially with the definition of OER: the content is free for learners and teachers, who may choose to use them as learning or teaching tools, but there are restrictions on modifications

and re-purposing. There is a growing trend towards change in this respect, however; some institutions, including Oxford University in the UK and Stanford and MIT in the US, now offer some of their materials under a variety of Creative Commons licences, some allowing sharing and remixing for derivative works.

The Open University joined iTunes U in June 2008 and since then has become a key player, providing more downloads than any other provider (over 52 million as of June 2012—over a quarter of these originating from the U.S.). With over 40 years' experience in producing resources for distance learning, The Open University offers materials that have been designed specifically for the independent learner. It offers thousands of free audio and video tracks as well as eBooks, including language learning resources for Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese, English and Welsh. Despite the fact that language materials only represent about 10% of the content that the Open University provides on iTunes U, they account for almost a third of all downloads, making languages the most successful among its resources. Open University language resources often take up the entire Top 10 downloads chart for languages on iTunes U.

In a recent 21-month large-scale survey I conducted, the results showed over 80% of respondents rated Open University language materials on iTunes U positively, and 97.2% stated that they believe the materials they download are helping them learn the language they are studying. iTunes U can help deliver free language learning resources to a worldwide audience, and the Open University experience is a prime example of success in delivering open language content that is both popular and high quality.

Laura Franklin

French Professor, Northern Virginia Community College in Alexandria, and editor of the *MERLOT* World Languages Collection.

Setting a high standard for OER content quality.

My experience with OER began in the year 2000 when I became one of two co-editors of the *Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching* (*MERLOT*). As a community college educator, I was very conscious of the need for affordable learning materials for my students, so the free and open promise of the resources contained in *MERLOT* was music to my ears.

My role involved working with language experts from many universities and colleges across the country and in Canada on peer review standards that would assure faculty members could use *MERLOT* materials with confidence. Content quality, potential effectiveness for use in teaching and learning, and ease of use are still the three criteria that *MERLOT* uses to evaluate the very best in learning materials. I also completed the composite peer reviews that appear on the website. Over the years, this work has provided enough quality material to enhance my French courses at all levels of instruction. Indeed, I could design whole language courses around these online materials.

"Content quality, potential effectiveness for use in teaching and learning, and ease of use are still the three criteria that *MERLOT* uses to evaluate the very best in learning materials."

In community college, as elsewhere, we see learners of all learning styles, proficiency levels, and achievement in language studies. The *MERLOT* language collection allows me to provide free access to high quality OER, from simple target language exercises to whole open courses and texts. There is video, audio, realia, and virtually every other kind of material that can be used in any classroom—face to face (f2f), hybrid, and online. My online students get to use the same excellent media that f2f students use, with the particular benefit of quality listening materials done by native speakers.

"OER and technology tools make learning possible for the many as opposed to the few, and they open up avenues for collaboration around the globe."
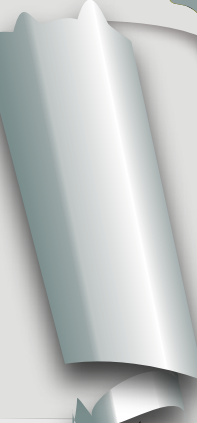
A project I am particularly proud of is the *MERLOT* Africa Network, which has made excellent use of OER for the benefit of the students on that continent. People all over the world are seeing the benefit of sharing knowledge—one of the greatest affordances of educational technologies and an appealing solution in difficult economic times. OER and technology tools make learning possible for the many as opposed to the few, and they open up avenues for collaboration around the globe.

I am extremely happy to be a part of this energizing time for education. Discovering new materials for learning and the best way to use them keeps me professionally alive!

Find out more about MERLOT at http://www.merlot.org.

Toni Theisen

ACTFL President and World Languages and Cultures department chair, Loveland High School, Colorado.

Using foreign language OER in the high school curriculum.

As a high school French teacher, I am always looking for OER that will enhance my students' language learning. Several years ago, I discovered *Français Interactif,* a rich online resource where students not only listen to and view videos and interviews with native speakers, but also experience vocabulary in context and expand their understanding of grammar. Each unit has an excellent interactive activity with printable worksheets, in addition to a song with lyrics that highlight the theme of each unit. Also available is a free, downloadable textbook in PDF that accompanies all the online media. Students or teachers can download the chapters separately for free or purchase the entire text as a print-on-demand book.

"Like many high school teachers, I have several multilevel classes. With this OER, students can learn on their own at their own pace while I am working with the other levels in class."

Many of the units match the thematic units of my classes: visiting a market, touring a French house, attending a birthday party. They like to watch the videos and the interviews because they bring the language and culture to life. My high school students also like the videos that document college students living their "French lives" while studying abroad. These videos have helped my students understand what happens when studying abroad. This aspect has encouraged many of my students to think about studying abroad when they go to college.

In addition to using *Français interactif* in class, I also have a Wikispace for my classes where students can work independently. Sometimes I link an activity or video from *Français interactif* on my Wikipage so students can practice when we have lab time. I also like to use the resources as a type of "flipped classroom" where students learn things at home and leave more time to practice in class. I especially like the *Tex's French Grammar* website that offers students another way to comprehend challenging grammar concepts. I have this site linked on the AP and IB summer practice site, too.

"I'd encourage teachers, students, and parents to learn about the wonderful world of OER."

Like many high school teachers, I have several multilevel classes. With this OER, students can learn on their own at their own pace while I am working with the other levels in class. Sometimes students just decide to choose a thematic unit and learn beyond what is happening in class. I also let parents know about this OER. They love it because it provides support for their children at home. I'd encourage teachers, students, and parents to learn about the wonderful world of OER.

Access Français interactif at http://laits.utexas.edu/fi/ and Tex's French Grammar at http://laits.utexas.edu/tex/.

Feefelobari ("Feefe") Yorka

Chemistry and Pre-Pharmacy degree candidate, UT Austin

First-time Yoruba learner and OER user shares her experience.

I am a beginning Yoruba student, and I used the open access textbook *Yorùbá Yé Mi* in the fall of 2011. The format and language, coupled with the technological aspect of the book, enabled me to learn Yoruba independently, in and outside of class. I was able to readily share my experience in a Yoruba course with both Yoruba-speaking and non-Yoruba-speaking friends in other cities and states because of the technology aspect.

It is wonderful that the textbook is available for free online. It allows the student to have access to course materials even during holidays when one does not feel like traveling home with books. I found it very convenient.

I was concerned at first to see a free textbook. It was my first time using free online instructional materials, so I was surprised to find that it was extremely user friendly and did a great job in gradually pulling the student into the Yoruba language, without the overwhelming effects usually attached to learning a new language.

"Being a teacher of Yoruba language is definitely not something I thought I would ever do, but it feels great to be able to pass on what I've learned to others."

Later, I was involved in acting and singing in Yoruba videos, which we students uploaded onto Youtube. The experience was a new one, but exciting to be able to work with other students while learning Yoruba. The atmosphere was energetic. It made the language more interesting and fun. I believe the videos are important because it presents a new style to learning that's not the usual lecture. And because it's in the form of a song, I felt it made learning Yoruba easier to remember.

Being a teacher of Yoruba language is definitely not something I thought I would ever do, but it feels great to be able to pass on what I've learned to others.

Yorùbá Yé Mi can be accessed at http://coerll.utexas.edu/yemi/.

Find the Yoruba videos by searching for "UT Yoruba" on YouTube.

Orlando Kelm

Creator of Brazilpod, a web portal to various Portuguese language learning resources.

How publishing under an open license benefits everyone, including the content creator.

Open education is all about community building, collaboration, sharing, and distribution. The power of open licensing in education comes from the underlying premise that users can retool contributions to the needs of the learners. The beauty of open licensing is that the creator still receives credit for the initial development. And the impact of open licensing is that rather than constrain, restrict, and limit content, we now open content to new ideas and new implementations. These benefits are at the center of the educational experience and that is what excites me about open licensing and open education. Let me give you a few examples from my own experience as a user and creator of OER.

"The power of open licensing in education comes from the underlying premise that users can retool contributions to the needs of the learners. The beauty of open licensing is that the creator still receives credit for the initial development."

A couple of years ago we (the *Brazilpod* team) received a request to retool our online video clips for proficiency testing purposes. We had never thought of applying those video-based materials to testing, and it was impressive to see that somebody else had thought of them in those terms. Similarly, many of the video topics that we came up with for our *Conversa Brasileira* series originated from video skits that our students had recorded, as part of their assignments with the *Portuguese Communication Tasks.*

That is to say, the students used one set of materials to generate ideas for their skits, and we, in turn, created a whole new series of video-based materials based on their ideas. Each new phase grew out of original applications to existing materials.

I remember the first time we found out that our *Spanish Proficiency Exercises* website was getting hits from people in Togo, Africa and Reykjavik, Iceland. Really, Togo, Africa and Reykjavik, Iceland! We once received an email from a user of *Interviews with Latin American Executives* who taught Spanish in Hungary. He asked for permission to make a Hungarian translation of the video clips. We were more than happy to give him permission.

More recently, a user of our *Conversa Brasileira* series, Nicola Mabbott, decided to create "lesson plans" to go with our online materials. All on her own, and simply for the pleasure of enhancing the materials, she decided to share her lesson plans with the world. (Read more about *Nicola Mabbott on page 20*.)

All of the resources mentioned can be accessed at *http://coerll.utexas.edu/brazilpod/.*

Tita Beaven

Department of Languages,
The Open University, UK

Calling for open educational practices in scholarship projects.

Although I have worked in the area of Open Educational Resources and Practices for several years, I have often thought that many outputs of scholarship activities are not always disseminated as openly as they could be. What can we teachers who are engaged in scholarship activities do to improve dissemination of and engagement with our work? I also strongly believe that the outputs of publicly funded research and scholarship should be available to all whenever possible. That is why when we applied for funding for a European Lifelong Learning project through the European Commission, we decided we would try to make the activities and outputs as open as possible.

"It has not always been easy, but we are finding that you just have to keep making the case for openness, and that slowly, one person at a time, you can make a difference."

Performing Languages is a Grundtvig adult education partnership project, which enables amateur actors from France, Spain, and Italy to work with language teachers at the Open University (OU). Together they explore, amongst other issues, how drama activities can be adapted to the language classroom. The primary aim of the learning partnership is not to produce materials but to share experiences and develop common understandings; however, from the beginning we were convinced that any resources we produced for our project (such as workshop activities, lesson plans, texts and video recordings) should be available as Open Educational Resources (OER), published under a Creative Commons

(http://www.creativecommons.org) license. That way, they will be available to everyone working in the lifelong learning areas of drama, language learning, and intercultural education. We are hoping that the experiences and ideas from this project can be either replicated by others or adapted to their specific contexts and needs. We believe that by making our resources open we will increase the impact of the project.

It has not always been easy, but we are finding that you just have to keep making the case for openness, and that slowly, one person at a time, you can make a difference. Most of the teachers who have taken part in the project have written activities for the language classroom based on what they learnt in the theatre, and have published them as OER. That in itself has been great to see (they are published in OU's language learning website LORO, Languages Open Resource Online repository of OER, and tagged as "performing languages").

I would encourage all teachers to think about making the results of their scholarship activities (be they teaching resources, case studies, workshop or conference presentations, or indeed journal articles) open to all, and to publish them through open licenses such as Creative Commons whenever that's appropriate. Others will be able to use them and adapt them, and the work will have a greater impact and help improve the quality of teaching and learning everywhere.

Visit Performing Languages at *http://www.performinglanguages.eu* and LORO at *http://loro.open.ac.uk.*

Ana Beaven

English Language Teacher,
University of Bologna

How using open resources on TED.com activated her students' curiosity and creativity.

As a teacher in a university language center, I am constantly searching for high-quality authentic materials which are relevant to students from different academic fields, and which I can transform into language teaching resources. Most such materials, however, are protected by copyright, making them extremely difficult to use legally in the classroom, let alone share among colleagues. Fortunately, some years ago, I came across a treasure trove: TED.com.

"Embracing openness is a slow process, and requires not only the necessary practical information but a true cultural shift."

It contains, among other things, an extensive series of videos of talks given by some of the world's most inspiring speakers on a huge range of topics, including the environment, technology, food, education, war and peace, and women's role in reshaping the world. These are not materials designed for the language classroom. However, they are freely available on the web with a Creative Commons licence.

The licensing choice made by TED organizers serves a dual purpose: first, it fulfills their mission of spreading the ideas of their speakers. Sir Ken Robinson's talk on how schools kill creativity, for example, has been viewed over 11 million times. At the same time, and of greater relevance to language professionals, it provides us with top quality video materials which can be adapted and repurposed to suit the needs of our language students. We can then share the resulting materials with other teachers around the world.

I have used TED videos for a number of purposes:

- to create authentic listening materials for upper-intermediate and advanced classes;
- to trigger debates on hot topics, which can then lead to the production of class wikis or to the students contributing to the debates on the TED website;
- to enhance reading materials found in the students' textbooks;
- to encourage the acquisition of field-specific lexis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses; and
- to provide university students from a range of different academic fields with top-quality video materials for self-guided study.

Often, the students' curiosity, triggered by a video watched in class, makes them want to explore the website and listen to other talks on other subjects. As one of my students observed, "TED was a true revelation; I never thought there were so many fascinating talks in one single place."

The next stage in the process is that of making those materials freely available to colleagues worldwide as Open Educational Resources (OER). This, for many teachers, is the difficult step. There are many issues involved, both practical and psychological, including whether the materials are good enough to be subjected to the scrutiny of one's peers, or concerns about how those resources will be used. These should be addressed as part of professional development initiatives. Embracing openness is a slow process, and requires not only the necessary practical information but a true cultural shift.

Once you understand the benefits of sharing, a whole universe opens up before you. Personally, this has been the most enriching development in my professional career.

Todd Bryant

Language Liaison,
Academic Technology,
Dickinson College, Pennsylvania

Creator of The Mixxer helps over 100,000 language learners connect with native speakers.

When I came to work at Dickinson College, I saw there was a need to connect our language students with native speakers via the internet. Some classes had already begun connecting students through text chat, but I hoped to introduce exchanges with audio as well. One Japanese language instructor, Professor Akiko Meguro, was anxious to connect her students via voice chat. She had seen a French class connect with native speakers by text. The problem was that her beginning students wouldn't be able to maintain a natural flow of conversation by typing in Japanese.

"The Mixxer ... is a social networking site built with a Drupal platform, allowing users to find partners for language exchanges."

We tried Skype as the voice client, due to its reliability and popularity in Japan, but we still needed to find native speakers to talk to our students. At the time, there were only a few free sites where teachers could look for language exchanges and they weren't very efficient. We also frequently ran into problems after contacting potential partners, due to time differences and semester schedules.
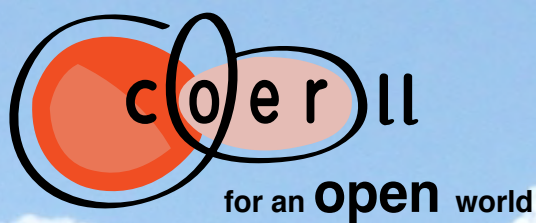
As an alternative, Professor Meguro began looking for individual English learners on a Japanese social networking site called Mixi. It was much easier to organize. The site allowed her to post the day and time when her class would be in the language lab, and asked students in Japan to message her if they were interested in a language exchange with our students.

It was a huge success! Professor Meguro's students enjoyed putting to use what they'd learned in the classroom, and the dynamics of the class fundamentally changed once the students recognized they would be practicing what they learned from each chapter during regular language exchanges with native Japanese speakers. The next step was to find a way to make this possible in all of our languages.

To do this, I created The Mixxer. It is little more than a social networking site built with a Drupal platform, allowing users to find partners for language exchanges.

Today, because it is simple and free, The Mixxer has grown to over 100,000 users. Now our students, or any user, can sign up and find a language partner on their own. Any instructor from any academic institution can also create an account and organize an "event" for their class, which sends out an invitation for native speakers of the target language to sign up for a language exchange. The Mixxer is now large enough that an instructor can be confident of connecting their students with a native speaker of almost any language. I can't emphasize enough what a positive change this has had on language students. My hope for the future is to provide a suggested structure and content for these exchanges using OER materials from COERLL, Connexions, and MERLOT, among other language learning resource portals.

Contact Todd Bryant at bryantt@dickinson.edu or by twitter (@bryantt).