

Exploring the Value of Open Education Labor

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How should the labor
involved in OER
creation, discovery, and
dissemination be
valued by institutions
and students?

Valuing OER Labor

Is the goal of affordability for students compatible with the often free, underpaid, and/or underrecognized labor of OER production?

How does the concept of "immaterial labor" illuminate these issues?

OER as Immaterial Labor

Lazzarato (1996) defines "immaterial labor" as "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity."

- "It becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish leisure time from work time."
- "Immaterial labor creates first and foremost a 'social relationship' (a relationship of innovation, production, and consumption)."

OER as Immaterial Labor

"The relegation of OER to the status of the immaterial, which etymologically suggests both a process of liberation from a corporeal context and a state of ideological diminishment, only further erodes the means we have for measuring or even recognizing the labor involved in the production and maintenance of these educational resources" (Almeida, 2017).

Valuing the Immaterial Labor of OER

Like other information and culture workers, OER laborers confront questions of how their work becomes entangled with their subjectivity and their leisure time.

The specific characteristics of OER make this especially so for OER labor:

- As free, openly licensed resources and alternatives to profit-driven textbook publishers, who are the producers and the consumers?
- How can this work be fairly compensated within the context of academia?

OER Labor within the Academy

How does OER labor fit into the landscape of "academic capitalism" or the neoliberalization of higher education?

Academic Capitalism and Neoliberalism

"Academic capitalism deals with market and market-like behaviors on the part of universities and faculty" (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001).

Neoliberal rhetoric as it applies to higher education and educational resources "confuses commercial value and social values" (Almeida, 2017).

Academic institutions and workers are positioned as entrepreneurs and students are positioned as consumers.

Academic Capitalism and OER Labor

In many ways, OER disrupt the neoliberalization of higher education by challenging the profit-driven textbook publishing industry as well as larger ideas of intellectual property.

At the same time, this immaterial labor becomes subject to the prestige economy of academia as it relates to faculty incentives and priorities (Crissinger, 2015; White, 2019).

Too much emphasis on the cost savings of OER may reinforce the student-as-consumer model (Almeida, 2019).

OER's Value and Pedagogy

Do students recognize the value of OER? How can we relate this question to pedagogy?

Student Attitudes Toward the Value of OER

Students who are accustomed to purchasing textbooks, and who may also view themselves as consumers of their university education, might not fully appreciate the value of OER.

- For instance, the view that OER are not "real textbooks."

This has implications for teaching: How do students distinguish OER from other resources, reliable or unreliable, on the Internet? How do instructors demonstrate the expertise behind the OER?

Potential Solutions to the Questions of OER's Labor Value?

Approaches to Valuing OER and OER Labor

Valuing immaterial labor:

- Making OER labor visible through appropriate compensation and attribution.
- This is not a "gift economy" (White, 2019).

Responding to the context of academia and the prestige economy:

- Distinguishing between "free" and "open" while interrogating the notion of "intellectual property" (Almeida, 2017; Crissinger, 2015).
- Advocating for institutional recognition of OER labor in tenure and promotion documents (Crissinger, 2015; DOERS3).

Integrating OER Value and Labor in Pedagogy

Assessing the value of OER can be integrated with the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy* (2016):

- Authority is constructed and contextual
- Information has value
- Scholarship as conversation

OER texts and open pedagogy practices can invite students to participate as knowledge makers and to critically engage with questions of how value is attributed to intellectual labor (Almeida, 2017; Crissinger, 2015).

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