

# TURNING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE INTO DIGITAL DIVIDENDS THROUGH FREE CONTENT AND OPEN NETWORKS: WIKIEDUCATOR LEARNING4CONTENT (L4C) INITIATIVE

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## ABSTRACT

In today's world where tuition fees continue to rise rapidly and the demand for higher education increases in both the developing and developed world, it is important to find additional and alternative learning pathways that learners can afford. Traditional education as we have known it has begun to change, allowing for new parallel learning opportunities to take shape and new avenues to open up. This paper describes the world's largest online training initiative on open education that teaches wiki technology to educators in the formal education sector worldwide.

WikiEducator, founded in 2006, initially operated with funding support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (WFHF) under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), an intergovernmental organization created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources, and technology. In May 2009, it became its own entity residing under Otago Polytechnic's International Centre for Open Education Resources under the auspices of the Open Education Resource Foundation (OERF) in Dunedin, New Zealand, where it continues today.

WikiEducator's flagship, the Learning4Content (L4C) project, builds capacity among global educators by teaching wiki technology to newcomers and experts in the field of open education. In exchange for the free training opportunity they receive, participants are asked to create open content on WikiEducator and contribute toward WikiEducator's strategic objectives. The success of the L4C project helped WikiEducator reach its target number of equipping 2,500 educators with wiki skills to create open educational resources online two years ahead of the initially planned three years and was the reason for a large additional number of novices and experts alike joining the project.

Even though many learners make use of the free learning opportunities offered through the L4C project, for those who do not have access to online content—or even computers—WikiEducator has developed a feature called “wiki-to-print,” which allows users to select free and open WikiEducator content and combine it into a book that can be printed and used offline. Distribution of these print-based, compiled books provides an opportunity to those who do not or will never have access to the Internet and technology to gain access to knowledge and information.

This paper will describe WikiEducator's stages of development and the outcomes it has achieved as the world's largest attempt to build wiki skills among global educators.

## KEY WORDS

Open Educational Resources, Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS), WikiEducator, Learning4Content (L4C) project, Open Educational Resource University (OERu), Open Education Resources Foundation (OERF), Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

## I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

WikiEducator represents a paradigm shift in how work is organized and is an example of a grassroots initiative as opposed to a top-down mandate. It was created for the purpose of building capacity among teachers and educators in the global educator community, developing free learning content, and establishing an international self-organizing community around Open Education Resource (OER) development through peer collaboration.

The initiative's development consists of three phases:

- Phase 1: Establishing foundations (May 2006–December 2007)
- Phase 2: Scaling up free content development by starting the L4C project (January–December 2008)
- Phase 3: Sustainable implementation of free content development (January 2009–ongoing)

WikiEducator was founded in 2006 and operated with funding support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (WFHF) under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), an intergovernmental organization created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources, and technology.

After moving on from COL, and becoming its own entity on April 28, 2009, it was incorporated under the New Zealand Companies Act of 1993 and found its new home within the newly founded Open Education Resource Foundation (OERF), an independent nonprofit organization that provides leadership, international networking, and support for educators and educational institutions to achieve their objectives through open education. It came under an Open Education patronage organization, the Otago Polytechnic's International Centre for Open Education in Dunedin, New Zealand. Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, WikiEducator's founding director, was appointed by the Otago Polytechnic to continue leading the project at the OERF. The OERF's focus on scalability, sustainability, and furthering the OER agenda enabled it to facilitate community and stakeholder engagements at multiple levels, incorporating a wide range of learners' backgrounds in many global regions.

In an effort to assist the New Zealand Ministry of Education with the establishment of a national OER commons for the school sector, the OERF secured a strategic grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in 2009. It also continued to receive financial support from the COL in Vancouver, Canada, WikiEducator's home in its formative years, to support the technology infrastructure of its websites, which were hosted by Athabasca University in Canada. Since 2010, the server has been hosted by the OERF itself. In addition, the OERF appointed a Senior Lead Software Engineer, thereby ensuring that open source software resource provision was in-house [1, 2].

WikiEducator's flagship, the Learning4Content (L4C) project, builds capacity among global educators by teaching wiki technology to newcomers and experts in the field of open education. In exchange for the free training opportunity they receive, participants are asked to create open content on WikiEducator and contribute toward WikiEducator's strategic objectives. The success of the L4C project helped WikiEducator reach its target number of equipping 2,500 educators with wiki skills to create open educational resources online two years ahead of the initially planned three years and was the reason for a large additional number of novices and experts alike joining the project. From 2010 to the present, many L4C and face-to-face workshops have taken place, some of which were formally registered, while others ran behind the scenes replicating the initial efforts. These workshops were carried out by WikiEducator's pool of volunteer online and face-to-face facilitators at educational institutions around the world, open universities, and other global teaching environments to develop free content resources in support of national curricula. WikiEducator's intention is not to replace closed content; to the contrary, motivated content developers work both in closed and open curriculum projects to produce quality content that is equally important in both spheres.

The year 2010 was also the year in which the Open Education Resource University (OERu) was founded. As its first official activity, the OERF hosted its first strategic international planning meeting for the

OERu project with the aim of implementing scalable systems of volunteer student support through community service learning approaches. It also aims to coordinate assessment and credentialing services on a cost-recovery basis for participating educational institutions to ensure credible qualifications and corresponding course articulation among anchor partners [3].

A community-driven community college called WikiEducator Open Learning Academy (WOLA) was established in 2012. The purpose of the community college is to assist with the formation of the OERu-ready global community of educators. The L4C project is one of its pillars, as is the newly developed Open Licensing Course 4 Educators (OCL4Ed), which has been offered four times since its inception, with massive numbers of enrollments, by the OERF in collaboration with Creative Commons, Athabasca University, and Otago Polytechnic University.

By end of June 2013, WikiEducator's active global educator online community grew to over 63,833 registered members contributing 20,433 articles, making over 934,878 edits to date, adding 34,799 files, and maintaining a pool of 32 volunteer administrators [9].

## II. PHASE 1: ESTABLISHING FOUNDATIONS (MAY 2006–DECEMBER 2007)

### A. The Four Cs: WikiEducator's Four Building Blocks

Inspired by the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, WikiEducator was founded as a community project with the intent of operating under the parameters of the Free Culture Movement and of offering a free version of the education curriculum by 2015.

The founding patron of WikiEducator was Sir John Daniel, the previous President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Learning (2004–2012), and its creator, was Dr. Wayne Mackintosh (2006–2009). The project adopted a community governance model, which is coordinated by WikiEducator's Open Community Council and is built on the work of an International Advisory Board. Volunteer WikiEducator Ambassadors [4] promoted the project around the globe, and WikiEducator's new technology road map helped to drive its agenda forward. To date, WikiEducator's technical infrastructure has been continuously supported through a financial contribution by the COL to the OERF.

WikiEducator's strategic objectives were built on—and continue to thrive on—achieving the four Cs, which are:

- A thriving **community** of practitioners and policy makers around the world committed to leveraging the potential of OERs, thereby facilitating the establishment of community networks and collaboration with existing free content initiatives in education.
- The **capacity** and skills to engage in the use of MediaWiki and supporting technologies and global best practices in peer collaboration models of OER development. For example, the L4C project provides free training in basic wiki skills to build capacity for OER development.
- Free **content** development that supports capacity building by adapting existing resources and repackaging them in formats that support reuse. An example would be the WikiEducator OER tutorials used for training in the L4C project.
- Ensuring smart **connections**, which refer to the technology requirements for a cost-effective OER initiative founded on open source technologies.

### B. Establishing Foundations

In the beginning phase (Phase 1), technologies were set up and processes were put in place to facilitate the development of free/open content by the educator community.

This goal was achieved by

- building capacity among global educators by teaching them how to use wiki technology to create open education materials;

- planning educational projects linked with the development of free content on WikiEducator;
- a process of self-organization, providing the community with the freedom to determine the kinds of projects, structures, and communication mechanisms used on WikiEducator;
- establishing a democratic governance model from the community for WikiEducator;
- developing collaborative and democratic community policies that support and promote the values of the WikiEducator community; and
- networking strategic relationships to ensure the right connections for a sustainable community.

One of the milestones in this phase was the establishment of the Free/Libre Open Source Software 4 Education (FLOSS4Edu) project [5]. It was a grassroots project that originated and launched in Kenya in November 2006. Its primary purpose was to address the absence of free content in African schools and the lack of skills and knowledge of how to use FLOSS technologies. It was founded to improve access to FLOSS resources in consideration of high bandwidth and shortage of FLOSS distribution channels.

In support of the planned launch of the Learning4Content Help Tutorials [6] to teach the use of wiki syntax for the purpose of developing open content on WikiEducator, Newbie Tutorials were developed and completed in February 2007. The community produced 22 book equivalents of free content on WikiEducator during 2007. WikiEducator achieved 1,000 users by May 2007 and 2,165 users by December 2007—more than doubling its number of users during that time. In October 2007, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation approved a USD 100,000 grant in support of the L4C project.

### **III. PHASE 2: SCALING UP FREE CONTENT DEVELOPMENT (JANUARY 2008–DECEMBER 2008)**

#### **A. Starting the Learning4Content (L4C) Project**

The L4C project constituted an integral component of Phase 2 of WikiEducator's strategic plan, namely to scale up the rate of OER content production. Learning4Content focused specifically on the outcome of building capacity in wiki skills for the international education community and became WikiEducator's flagship. The L4C project aimed to provide free training for educators in return for one free lesson plan developed on WikiEducator for the benefit of others.

Wiki syntax training established clear pathways for a wide variety of individuals to develop open content and contribute to WikiEducator projects. WikiEducator became a one-stop platform or portal that clearly identified the areas and fields where assistance and support were needed. It also differentiated and communicated the skill requirements for individual projects when it came to learning and content design, multimedia and visual design, linguistic design, and research and technical design.

The L4C project was officially launched in January 2008, running its first pilot online-training workshop from January 28–February 8, 2008, under the lead facilitation of Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, the founder of WikiEducator. From then onward, with the generous financial support of WFHF, WikiEducator conducted one Learning4Content online training workshop per month for the duration of the project, with a pool of international facilitators groomed out of the Learning4Content initiative. Each workshop was initially held for ten days before a second set of compressed Learning4Content Help Tutorials were developed for intermediate- to advanced-level learners, reducing the time and effort required to complete the course to five days. Participation initially started out slowly but drew record numbers for WikiEducator very quickly, becoming a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). The WikiEducator MOOCs did not require prerequisites, making the barrier to entry low.

The L4C training workshops were headed by volunteer online facilitators (asynchronously) and supported by e-mail. Participants signed learning “contracts” to develop open materials on WikiEducator for the benefit of the global educator and learner community. At the end of each training workshop, facilitators certified participants based on demonstrated skills on their own user pages following the criteria of the WikiEducator WikiMaster program [7].

From its inception in January 2008 through June 30, 2010, the L4C activity hosted 51 online and 62 face-to-face workshops among 4,253 registered participants. Training workshops were held in 113 countries, of which some countries ran two workshops consecutively due to the great demand for this learning opportunity. The male-to-female ratio of participation was about 50:50 at the time but used to be in favor of male participation, whereas statistics drawn in November 2012 indicated that female participation was predominant: 46.7% were male versus 53.3% who were female [10].

Social media such as Facebook, a dedicated Google Group for instructional notices and all communications (with embedded links to WikiEducator), WIZIQ (a virtual boardroom) and WikiEducator's Moodle site, as well as other integrated technologies, were used to promote each L4C workshop. The L4C training workshops often brought together very high numbers of participation through other social media sites, which were always integrated into WikiEducator, where the actual courses were conducted. Each L4C workshop had its own website specifically designed for the event.

During the period from July 1, 2008–June 30, 2009, WikiEducator recorded 2,816,190 visitors to the WikiEducator website compared with 1,860,969 visitors the previous year, an increase of 51% in traffic to the site [9]. WikiEducator registered 5,751 new accounts during the 2009 financial year compared with 3,099 new accounts in 2008, an increase of 86%. Drawing on database statistics, it was calculated that WikiEducator has produced the equivalent of 88 study guides or textbooks through volunteer authoring during that time. The community produced 49 book equivalents during 2009 compared with 22 during 2007, representing an increase of 123%. This equated to 4.08 book equivalents per month for 2009, compared with 1.83 book equivalents per month in 2008 [8].

WikiEducator was named the inaugural recipient of the 2008 Merlot Africa Network and eLearning Africa (MANeLA) Award in the “Free Software for OER Content Authoring” category. An *OER Handbook for Educators* went to print in August 2008. It was designed to help educators find, use, develop, and share OER to enhance their effectiveness online and in the classroom [11]. In June 2008, because of the absence of a formally elected council and lack of an election policy, the first WikiEducator Council was elected. In September of 2008, the WikiEducator community had grown to 5,941 registered users, almost double the results of May 2008.

Learning4Content was instrumental in driving WikiEducator forward. It reached its strategic plan two years ahead of schedule and has become the fastest-growing wiki on WikiEducator to date. The largest Learning4Content workshop ever held, with a record 421 participants, hosted under the motto “Giving Back the Gift of Knowledge,” took place in July 2010. It was conducted with 29 volunteer facilitators and participants from over 50 countries.

#### **IV. PHASE 3: SUSTAINABLE IMPLEMENTATION (JANUARY 2009–ONGOING)**

##### **A. Sustainable Implementation of Free Content Development**

The success of the free content movement in education is measured when real students enroll in real programs using free content. The approach taken was from the “Build it and they will come” idea, which seemed to work best. One of WikiEducator's initiatives in Phase 3, which focused on sustainable implementation, was the development of the Commonwealth Computer Navigator Certificate (CCNC). This certificate was created on WikiEducator to widen access to basic information and communication technology (ICT) skills, and training on topics such as data processing, spreadsheets, and the how-tos of Internet communication. The course consists of free content and teaches ICT skills using free software.

New FLOSS4Edu chapters were established in West Africa, India, and Francophone Commonwealth countries as well as in the Pacific region during the years 2006–2009. During 2010, the OERF administered 24 workshops (13 online workshops, 3 face-to-face workshops, and 6 face-to-face workshops hosted by third-party institutions) registering 1,429 participants. During this time WikiEducator has increased the number of “qualified” facilitators who will carry on in the future and facilitate further Learning4Content workshops. Qualified facilitators are those who have built up their

knowledge base of wiki skills under the WikiEducator WikiMaster Program (<http://www.wikieducator.org/WikiMaster>) to the level of Wiki Artisan and have supported an experienced L4C facilitator in many L4C workshops before becoming a lead facilitator themselves.

## **B. WikiEducator Open Learning Academy (WOLA)**

WikiEducator to date remains the flagship activity of the OERF. In the summer of 2012, in an effort to continue building capacity and to provide a space for continued online facilitation, teaching, and mentoring opportunities, WikiEducator’s international educator community—through a consensus—voted for the establishment of a community-driven community college called WikiEducator Open Learning Academy (WOLA). The purpose of the community college is to assist with the formation of an OERu-ready global community of educators.

A workgroup to propose a vision, mission, interim organizational structure, business procedure, and pilot initiatives for WOLA has been constituted, and a consensus has been reached on the way forward and next steps. One of WOLA’s building blocks is the continuation of the L4C training workshops as well as the OCL4Edu course.

## **C. Open Content Licensing for Educators Workshop (OCL4ED)**

UNESCO contracted the OERF to design and develop an online workshop for educators who want to learn more about open education resources, copyright, and Creative Commons licenses. Using Learning4Content, the course materials were developed as a collaborative project including volunteers from the OERF, WikiEducator, the OpenCourseWare Consortium, and Creative Commons. The Open Content Licensing for Educators course provides essential knowledge required by educators about how to legally remix open education materials and to help institutions to take informed decisions about open content licenses for their teaching and research materials.

The Open Content Licensing for Educators workshops have been hosted on WikiEducator and have averaged 556 participants per workshop. With the completion of the last course, presented from December 3–14, 2012, the OCL4Ed initiative has now provided free learning opportunities to 2,242 global educators. OCL4Ed in December 2012 attracted 327 registrations from 60 different countries. The June 2012 course registered 516 participants, and the January 2012 course registered 1,067 participants. The pilot course registered 332 participants [12].

## **V. REACHING THE RURAL OR HARD-TO-REACH POPULATION**

More than 1.2 billion people, or 30% of the world’s population, are poor [13]. Although many will never gain access to education, ICT-enabled development activities are using both traditional and modern technologies to provide access to required information and knowledge in rural communities. In response, WikiEducator developed a feature called “wiki-to-print,” which allows a user to select and combine free and open WikiEducator content into a book that can be printed and used offline. The feature enables those who do not always have connectivity to participate in this phenomenon by collating desired collections of OER for reproduction in a portable document format (PDF)

## **VI. ANALYTICS OF WIKIEDUCATOR AND ITS REACH**

Analysis of the WikiEducator educator community using Survey Monkey [8] indicated that 27.2% of new WikiEducator members who have created an account on WikiEducator are coming from the African and Asia/Pacific region, followed by North American and European members who joined the initiative.

- 73.1% are educators (teachers, lecturers, or trainers).
- 18.6% are researchers.
- 18.4% are learners (students, scholars, or school pupils).
- 47.7% of new members are mostly interested in tertiary (higher) education.

- 70.5% have joined WikiEducator to learn wiki skills and develop free content materials (61.6%) and to connect with the WikiEducator community (55.7%).
- 67.2% are researching innovative educational trends and ideas.
- 51.8% wish to grow personally.
- 57.6% of new members were brought in through somebody they knew who already had a WikiEducator account.
- 42.4% did not know anyone in the community.
- 67.9% of newbies visited the community, logging in less than five times before joining.
- 6.7% needed to log in more than ten times before they joined the community.

The majority of newbie WikiEducators (64.5%) are beginners, 28.4% have intermediate wiki skills, and 7.0% have advanced wiki skills. South America makes up only 4.4% of new WikiEducator memberships. The picture that emerges shows that educators are often joining WikiEducator from the higher education sector and through the introduction of their peers and friends who already have WikiEducator accounts. They participate to research new trends and ideas, to grow personally, to connect with other educators around the globe, and to learn how to create open content.

In 2012, the Open Educational Resource (OER) movement gained momentum during the first World OER Congress held in Paris, France, in June [14]. This event brought together Education Ministers from a variety of countries to agree on an OER strategy and way forward to make OER mainstream. The outcome of the OER World Congress led to the “Paris Declaration,” which contains recommendations to

1. foster awareness and use of OER;
2. facilitate enabling environments for use of information and communication technologies (ICT);
3. reinforce the development of strategies and policies on OER;
4. promote the understanding and use of open licensing frameworks;
5. support capacity building for the sustainable development of quality learning materials;
6. foster strategic alliances for OER;
7. encourage the development and adaptation of OER in a variety of languages and cultural contexts;
8. encourage research on OER;
9. facilitate finding, retrieving, and sharing of OER; and
10. encourage the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

Since the OER World Congress in Paris and the recommendations made for OER development, the OER movement has undergone a shift and has catapulted quite a few countries into action. Many new OER initiatives are emerging, and policy developments on the national and regional levels, and even on some institutional levels, are underway worldwide.

## VII. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

### A. Open Educational Resources University (OERu)

Since 2010, the OER Foundation prepared for a new development that resulted in the hosting of its first open planning meeting on February 23, 2011, in Dunedin, New Zealand, for the “Open Educational Resources (OER) for Assessment and Credit for Students” project [17]. UNESCO provided support for live streaming the meeting on the Internet to enable virtual participation by education leaders and other interested parties. The OERF, Otago Polytechnic (New Zealand), the University of Southern Queensland (Australia), and Athabasca University (Canada) collaborated on this project, as founding anchor partners, to provide flexible pathways for OER learners to earn formal academic credit and pay reduced fees for assessment and credit.

The Open Educational Resource University (OERu) is described as a virtual collaboration of like-minded institutions that aims to provide free learning opportunities to students worldwide using OER learning materials in an attempt to obtain credible qualifications from recognized education institutions. The OERu is deeply rooted in the community service and outreach mission to develop a parallel learning universe to add value to traditional delivery systems in postsecondary education. Through the community service mission of participating institutions, students will pay reduced fees for assessment and credit. [16]

The OERu's main focus is to offer courses and programs based solely on OER and open textbooks and to design and implement scalable pedagogies appropriate for the OER university concept. They will establish scalable systems of volunteer student support through community mission learning approaches and coordinate assessment and credentialing services on a cost-recovery basis for participating education institutions to ensure credible qualifications and corresponding course articulation among anchor partners.

The OERu network aims to provide more affordable access to postsecondary education for the estimated 100 million learners in the world who are qualified for a seat in tertiary education today but, due to funding issues or lack of tertiary education provision, will not be able to gain credible qualifications.

This tertiary education network proposes that OERu students will gain free access to high-quality courses that are designed for independent study using OER. OERu learners will receive student support through a global network of volunteers and peer support using social software technologies. Students can be assessed for a fee by participating institutions and earn a credible credential.

The OERu's founding anchor partners are:

1. The Athabasca University
2. The Open Education Resource Foundation (OERF) (nonteaching)
3. The Otago Polytechnic
4. The University of the Southern Queensland (USQ)
5. BC Campus, Canada (nonteaching)
6. Empire State College (State University of New York), United States
7. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, India (Gujarat Open University)
8. Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology, New Zealand
9. North Tech, New Zealand
10. South New Hampshire University, United States
11. Thompson Rivers University, Canada
12. University of Canterbury, New Zealand
13. University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa
14. University of Wollongong, Australia

Additional anchor institutions have joined the OERu since then. They are:

15. Excelsior College, United States
16. Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Canada
17. Open University of Catalonia, Spain
18. Thomas Edison State College, United States
19. Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand
20. University of Glamorgan, United Kingdom
21. University of the South Pacific, Fiji
22. Wintec, New Zealand



A number of important building blocks for the OERu are as follows:

- **OER assets:** These involve the integration of existing international education resources into an open pedagogy model, including open access content, open access journals, and open textbooks.
- **Existing expertise:** This includes a wealth of transferable experiences from open and distance learning to support the design and development of the OERu.
- **Financial resources:** These include contributions in time from participating institutions and funding support from external donors for strategic elements that will be required to address the gaps in available OERs and the design of new components of the OERu system.
- **Participating institutions:** The OERu aimed to achieve a critical mass of anchor partners who all agreed to the core principles of engagement for providing formal academic credit for OERu courses. Initially, the OERu aimed to recruit one educational institution from each of the global regions.
- **ICT infrastructure:** This consists of reliable and scalable open source software systems that exist for implementing the OERu collaboration.

The logic model of the OERu distinguishes three core categories to achieve the OER University project:

- **OERu network:** This covers those activities where cross-institutional collaboration is more effective than institution-based service provision.
- **Educational institution services:** These refer to the fee-for-service initiatives that will be provided by participating postsecondary institutions on a cost-recovery basis.
- **OER support infrastructure:** This incorporates the cross-cutting infrastructure needed to support a scalable network for the OER University project.

During the foundation phase, the OERu aims to develop two credentials: one undergraduate and one postgraduate. Depending on available resources and contributions from participating institutions, more credentials may be developed.

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) turned the OERu vision of free learning opportunities with pathways to achieve formal academic credit into reality by announcing on October 3, 2012, the launch of its first open course, Regional Relations in Asia and the Pacific (AST1000). The course commenced on November 23, 2012, and completed in April 2013. OERu learners were able to enroll, and interested students were advised on how to obtain a formal assessment from USQ.

The L4C training workshops and the OCL4Ed courses are examples of existing activities of the OERF that contribute to the achievement of the outputs of a particular initiative. Determining the first qualifications for the OERu is an example of an activity required for the Open Curriculum initiative.

This logic model approach is designed to provide a framework for international collaboration where different institutions and individuals can take responsibility for leading the successful completion of the range of activities necessary for building the OERu.

In December 2012, the Otago Polytechnic announced that their new Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education, recently approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, would be offered as a full credential for the OERu network based solely on OER using Creative Commons licenses. The course materials for the Graduate Diploma will be hosted on WikiEducator. This will create opportunities for formal certification pathways for a number of WikiEducator's free training initiatives, including OCL4Ed and Learning4Content, which will be integrated into an elective course in Open Education Practice.

The OER Foundation, as a small educational charity, does not currently have the capacity or infrastructure to award certificates of participation or formally assessed certificates of proficiency for the OCL4Ed or Learning4Content workshops. However, this new development will create pathways for future WikiEducators participating in free professional development workshops who would like some form of certification.

The workshop materials, hosted on WikiEducator, will always be open access without any requirement to register an account for participation in these international workshops. In this way we can ensure free learning opportunities for educators who want to learn more about OER, copyright, and Creative Commons.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

While open education is far from being mainstream at this point, it continues to grow, raise awareness, and build capacity for its cause: to make education freely available for all and to reduce the costs of educational textbooks. It motivated international governments to start making textbooks openly available not only to their own people, but also to others. This consequently opens up additional opportunities for informal students to obtain formal accreditation directly.

Educational institutions are slowly starting to embrace this still relatively new phenomenon. They are often pursuing parallel teaching environments, face to face and online, in dedicated areas within established traditional education systems to cater to this need.

With the current movement in the education system, the newly established OERu is attempting to add value to existing postsecondary institutions by developing and establishing open pathways for learners to use open educational learning materials available on the Internet and to earn credentials from reputable higher education institutions. The skills a learner has acquired online can then be formally assessed by an appropriate academic entity upon request and with very little money.

The WikiEducator L4C project continues to play a major role for the OER Foundation by educating learners around the world about the use of wiki technology to develop open educational resources on WikiEducator, and thereby is a contributing project to build capacity in the OER world.

The recently established WikiEducator Open Learning Academy has made the L4C project one of their community-driven and selected pillars in an effort to provide continuation and sustainability of this OER project. For many learners, the L4C project has been the initial step into the still new world of open education, thereby raising awareness while building capacity at the same time. Through the L4C project, institutions started realizing that working together is far better than going at it alone.

The WikiEducator online community to a large extent has grown out of the L4C project and is proud to call 62,384 members its own as of March 20, 2013. Teachers, lecturers, or trainers working in the formal education sector make up 74% of the members of the community. Many OER champions have emerged out of the participating WikiEducator L4C educator community. These are individuals who have gained a stronger understanding of how they can use WikiEducator as a tool in their own learning environment to effect change in their own communities and/or in their educational institutions, whether as individuals or as part of clusters of an institution. The excitement and newly gained confidence of L4C participants soars after they acquire their new wiki skills and experiences. This newfound confidence leads to many positive effects, as participants feel empowered to seek new leadership roles both within and outside of the WikiEducator community. An example of the effect of this enthusiasm is the WikiEducator India chapter, and there are many others [15].

The L4C project has demonstrated a powerful and cost-effective model to scale up development capability on an international scale. While funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the L4C project is nearing 10,000 educators trained in the use of wiki technology. It is the world's largest training project for building wiki skills for educators in the formal sector worldwide and will continue to flourish and thrive with many new activities for further growth underway.

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## XI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation** provided generous funding support to the **Commonwealth of Learning (COL)** in October 2007 to assist in building capacity in MediaWiki editing skills for at least 2,500 educators in 52 countries of the Commonwealth. COL supported the project by providing continued technical support and the staff costs for 1.5 persons.

After WikiEducator had become its own entity under the **Open Education Resources Foundation (OERF)** in New Zealand in 2009, **the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation** continued supporting WikiEducator's (WE) Learning4Content project with additional funding support to improve content interoperability between MediaWiki and Connexions. COL continued to provide technical support for the project.

It should be acknowledged that without the funding support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Commonwealth of Learning, and the tireless efforts of the Open Education Resources Foundation and its founding and other partners; WE's international pool of facilitators, volunteers, enthusiasts, and advocates; and the engagement of the WE educator community all around the world, the project would not have become the largest capacity-building project for wiki editing skills.

## XII. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Patricia Schlicht** joined the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), an intergovernmental organization created by Commonwealth Heads of Government, to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources, and technology, and brought her international project management skills from a variety of national and international governments and nongovernment organizations to COL in 2000. Since her employment at COL, she has gained extensive knowledge in open and distance learning (ODL) and blended learning using social media and open education tools, to raise awareness and build capacity to create social change.

When the Learning4Content initiative on WikiEducator (WE) was launched in January 2008, she started facilitating WE's Learning4Content workshops while still at COL and grew quickly into the role of Learning4Content Coordinator and Community Builder on WikiEducator in an ongoing effort to build a sustainable global online community of educators and teachers around the world.

She has a passion for learning and believes that education and access to education should be freely available. She is a skilled and experienced enthusiast at using integrated and open technologies, her broad international experiences, her knowledge, and a strong interest in innovation to promote open education and social change.

Ms. Schlicht continues to support the world's largest capacity building OER project—WikiEducator—since its migration from COL in 2009 to the Open Education Resource Foundation (OERF) under the auspices of the Otago Polytechnic's International Centre for Open Education in her free time.

