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Final report: OpenLIVES (Learning Insights from the Voices of Emigrés from Spain)

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Outline

Partner institutions: University of Leeds, University of Portsmouth, University of Southampton

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Synopsis

The OpenLIVES project has published a wealth of important historical data documenting the life histories of Spanish émigrés in the 20th Century, as open content for others to adapt and use; it has built on this content with a range of student-produced resources and tutor-created materials, and it has embedded these open resources into teaching at three different UK institutions. It has demonstrated that the use of open, original research materials can increase creativity and innovation in teaching, and can be a motivating force for students to create their own open, high quality open educational resources. The project has been transformative in its impact on teachers and learners.

Introduction

This article describes the work of the OpenLIVES project, its aims, methodology, challenges and successes. The project has been a collaboration between three UK universities: Southampton, Leeds and Portsmouth, and it sought to engage teaching staff and students with digital resources through a full cycle of use: data collection, repurposing data as teaching resources, testing in practice and integration in the curriculum. The project digitised and published (for open access) a set of research data documenting Spanish migrant experiences and worked collaboratively with a community of academics and students to create and evaluate a suite of open educational resources related to this data. Materials, as well as open practice itself, were then embedded and integrated into teaching at each institution, transforming the practice of the team involved in the project and the learning experience of their students.

Background to the materials

The base dataset of research, which the project digitised, published and repurposed as OERs, was collected by researchers in Modern Languages, at the University of Southampton, as part of a research project in 2008 called 'Tales of Return'.¹ This primary source material documents the experiences of Spanish migrants and returning migrants, and it consists of approximately 30 hours of oral testimony, images and other print-based ephemera (in both English and Spanish). Spain underwent a period of extreme political turmoil in the last century along with periods of serious economic difficulty, and consequently experienced a high level of emigration. Emigrants were dispersed across the world, travelling to a range of countries including the UK, Russia, USA, France and Venezuela. Many were child evacuees during the Civil War and their stories offer harrowing experiences and moving insights into the desperation, tragedy and joys of migration. Following the political changes in Spain, many emigrants subsequently returned to Spain, and the experiences of

¹ The lead investigator produced a book based on this research: Pozo-Gutierrez, A. and Broomfield, P. (2012) eds. "Here, look after him": Voices of Basque evacuee children of the Spanish Civil War, University of Southampton

those who returned had rarely been studied until work was undertaken by researchers at Southampton.

Once 'Tales of Return' had been completed, the material was archived on a shelf, with no plan to be used further. The OpenLIVES project sought to give this primary data new life by making it online and open to other researchers, students and the global community. The open publication of Spanish migrant experiences makes an important contribution to the study of migration in general, as well as to the particular study of Spanish language, society and culture in the 20th Century.

Why did we conceive the project?

The study of Spain and the Spanish language has seen a growth in popularity in the UK², in recent years; however, Modern Languages are still designated by HEFCE as 'Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects.' A 2009 HEFCE review of Modern Languages in Higher Education³ identified a need for university departments and other bodies to work together to show how historical scholarship and cultural study relates to the whole discipline of MFL, and how languages departments contribute to the strategic objectives of institutions and HE in general.⁴ The project responds to this need, and the team planned to use the core research data to create resources related to the themes of employability, enhancement of the student learning experience, research skills, and language and area studies teaching. These are all themes of strategic importance to each partner institution and to the sector as a whole.

Migration Studies is a humanities discipline which can be enhanced by knowledge of languages and is of on-going interest and debate in the wider world. Primary research data of the kind published through OpenLIVES has potential relevance to a wide range of academic disciplines including history, politics, economics, geography, and sociology. Academic research into issues around migration is essential in guiding and informing current debates about globalisation and transnationalism and, therefore, in enhancing understanding of the world in the 21st Century. The fact that OpenLIVES has been taking place within a new context of economic turmoil and renewed migration from Spain has given project work an added poignancy and relevance.

What did we aim to do?

We started out with the core aims of publishing data, creating OERs and embedding open practice in teaching, and were immensely gratified to see the project expand and deepen as it drew in students across all three institutions, the original interviewees (again), and other academics and researchers across the UK and Spain. The project has turned out to be larger and more far-reaching than we expected.

How did we do it?

The project team met at an early point to discuss aims and objectives and a timetable for project activities. Enthusiasm for the project was extremely high amongst the team and each team member

² Review of Modern Foreign Languages provision in higher education in England, HEFCE, by M. Worton: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_41/

³ Ibid.

⁴ Recommendation 1, paragraph 206. *ibid.*

came to the meeting brimming with ideas and ambitions for their own role in the project, and for the project as a whole. This level of enthusiasm was maintained throughout the project lifecycle and it meant that we were able to achieve a rich and rewarding cross-institutional collaboration.

Our initial intention was to keep each phase of the project separate (i.e. the digitisation, OER-creation, embedding of materials in teaching) so that each element could build on the last; however, this concept was immediately abandoned as all partners were keen to start using materials with students as soon as they could, and to build open practice into their teaching. However, for the purpose of this report, I will describe project methodology under headings which match the broad phases of project activity.

Digitisation

The LLAS team worked on preparing, digitising and publishing the recordings on the HumBox, a repository for teaching and learning materials related to the humanities (www.humbox.ac.uk). The core data set consists of 23 interviews in which Spanish emigrants talk about their life histories to an academic researcher. This raw research data ranges in length from one hour to six hours, and an early decision was made to publish the whole of each recording as it stood, with minimal editing. The rationale for this was to enable other researchers and teachers to work with the materials as oral history artefacts in themselves (i.e. ‘warts and all’) and to enable discussion about the challenges of collecting oral histories, for example in ensuring a quiet location (there is traffic and other noise on some recordings), or dealing with the input of third parties (friends or spouses interrupting or contributing to interviewees’ stories). The majority of editing work on the recordings related to the embedding of licensing information at the beginning of each extract (a pre-recorded rubric), adding consistent licensing information on digital ID3 tags, and editing identifying information out of interviews in which the speaker wished to remain anonymous.

Alongside the recordings, there were ethnographic notes made by the original researchers, which described the context under which the interview was made; a selection of images and drawings provided by interviewees; transcripts in Spanish or English; synopses in English, and videoed interviews with the original researcher. All of these files were digitised or re-created digitally (i.e. re-typed in MS Word), had license information embedded, and were then published along with the recordings. Synopses or videos which were created for the project were made using templates with embedded Creative Commons licence information.

Materials were published in collections under the name of each interviewee, so that each collection contained where possible: a recording, a transcript, a synopsis, ethnographic notes, images, a video related to the interview. A new feature was installed on the HumBox to allow the creation of groups so that all materials could be published coherently under an ‘OpenLIVES’ group (<http://humbox.ac.uk/group/2>) banner. Some of the materials were also re-packaged into iTunesU channels at the close of the project: ‘Incredible People, Incredible Stories’ (<http://itun.es/i6Jy39M>) and Research Skills for Oral History (<http://itun.es/i6JQ7vq>).

Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez, the researcher who collected the original interviews admits to being “*seduced by the concept*” of open practice because it would give her research materials a new life and be a way of continuing and expanding on her work:

“I’ve learnt what can be done with the material other than writing academic papers...what can be done pedagogically. I’ve been inspired by concepts such as ‘students as producers...’, the concept of the global learning community...the idea of democratisation of education. Those are now the principles that will guide my future work...”- Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez, Southampton

Permissions

The most significant challenge which the project faced was the issue of permissions. At the time the original interviews were made, interviewees signed a permissions form which allowed their voice and words to be used for ‘educational purposes,’ but no further permissions were obtained for materials to be put online or made available as open content. It was felt by the project management team that for OpenLIVES to go forward, further permissions would be needed for the testimonies to be made available as open content. However, other team members strongly disagreed with the proposal to ask interviewees to sign a second permissions form, as it was felt that this would be confusing and unhelpful to a group of people who would be in advanced age; come from a cultural background more inclined to openness and less-rule bound, and who had experienced suffering and discrimination under an authoritarian regime (and would see a formal permissions form as a repressive instrument). After a long period of discussion and debate, it was decided that an informal letter would be sent out to interviewees, informing them of our intentions and offering the opportunity for them to decline permission for their testimony to be used in the project. At the same time, the team devised robust plans to contextualise the content to be released within the HumBox repository and ensure that licence information was attached to original resources (see above).

OER-creation

OERs related to original research materials were created by partners from an early point in the project with the Southampton partners creating online interactive learning activities related to research skills; the Leeds partner developing autonomous learning activities, and the Portsmouth partner involving students in the creation of interactive magazines about interviewees’ lives. Students’ dedication and attention to detail in creating OERs was impressive and admirable, and enabled them to become intimately acquainted with the life histories of some OpenLIVES interviewees:

“I would like to thank you for letting me work on this project. XXX’s story is incredible and the last few weeks have been a little surreal - I feel like I have been sitting in his front room and also travelling in time!”- final-year undergraduate, Leeds

“It is very interesting to see what happened to him [interviewee] in France because I study French. For my dissertation I’m researching life in France, and this has given me another view about what happened to the war children...to the Spaniards that had to escape from the Franco dictatorship.”- 2nd year undergraduate, Portsmouth

At Portsmouth, contact was made with one of the interviewees and students became involved in recording new questions to put to him. The interviewee was then videoed responding to the questions. The video was then passed over to Southampton students to take on as a final-year subtitling project:

“We learned...subtitling conventions of 35 characters per line – keeping the meaningful semantic units together. We respected the deadline and learned to work together! We were a little bit of everything at the same time: transcribers, translators, proof readers and editors. We are really proud of the result!”- student comment

Students were also paid a small sum to provide English synopses of the interviews and to do some editing and checking of anonymous recordings. These tasks demanded a high level of language knowledge and commitment to project aims. They also created the project logo. *“We learned about design and to play with colours – we wanted to represent in the LOGO the mission of the project...”*

Another of the original researchers (Dr Darren Paffey) who had conducted many of the interviews also became involved by reviewing and providing guidance on the content of research data. He also agreed to be interviewed on video about his personal experiences in collecting the interviews, and these videos accompany the audio recordings. In addition, a research officer was contracted to provide transcriptions of the recordings – a massive job, which ultimately could not be completed by the end of the project.

Embedding content into teaching

Partners at Portsmouth and Southampton worked to embed content into teaching from the beginning of the project. Partners at Southampton built the interviews into sessions on Spanish language and research skills and have continued to do this for the life of the project, incorporating new materials as they have become available. Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez works regularly with Irina Nelson, at the University of Southampton, to integrate content and language teaching – concepts which are traditionally taught separately within language curriculums in UK universities. Both were excited by how project work enabled this integration in a fluid way:

“Language is not devoid of context...and what an amazing opportunity to be able to contextualise it within connections of history, ethnographic studies, film studies...with all the disciplines involved in this work.”- Irina Nelson, Southampton

The partner at Portsmouth started out by incorporating the interview material into a final-year language module (2012) which involved the creation of digital magazines by students (see e.g at http://data.axmag.com/data/201205/U15362_F91761/index.html). Students used their language skills to clear all rights issues and secure permissions with third party copyright holders. These magazines have gone on to become educational resources in their own right and used by new finalists in 2013, as well as for beginner language work (it should be noted that the magazines online have not been corrected for language, in order to be used for language work). Miguel Arrebola, at the University of Portsmouth, noted that through project work he had attained an enhanced understanding of the role of student-produced content in learning and teaching:

“It has made me realise how important the materials we use are in terms of motivating our students and also it has allowed me to realise that our students can be good producers of OERs...producers of high quality OERs and partners in research, which is something I had not explored before. The quality of what they produce is really, really good...” – Miguel Arrebola, Portsmouth

For the Leeds partner, the project enabled him to introduce innovative teaching methods, approaches and assessments to the delivery of Spanish in his institution. He spent the early part of the project designing and planning a new final year module to run in 2012-13. This innovative module was based on the OpenLIVES materials and required language students to develop and use a range of critical, research and technical skills in the creation of their own video documentaries about economic migration from Spain. The module was approved and ran successfully with 15 students.

[The project] has been very important for me professionally because I have learnt many different skills, I have developed new career paths, I feel more confident as a practitioner, I think I can offer better education and better learning and teaching to my students. I feel now that I can make a greater difference in student education.”- Antonio Martinez-Arboleda, Leeds

All materials and teaching content related to the course have been published as OERs under the OpenLIVES group on HumBox.

Students at the University of Leeds responded positively to the innovative design of the OpenLIVES module which involved original research and technical skills alongside language knowledge:

“I have really enjoyed the OpenLIVES module as it has given us, the students, an opportunity to do our own primary research and genuinely engage with the issues we are studying. Having more academic and creative control over our own education is extremely stimulating and motivating.”

“I would say that I also feel far more valued as a student on this module, as our ideas and feedback are almost simultaneously incorporated into the module - for example, which other tutor asks us what we feel we should be assessed on? It is also interesting to be able to engage with wider society through our work, through the interviews, and to be able to feel like we are doing something worthwhile and valuable outside of academia. The skills I have gained during this module will be of far higher worth to me in my future career than all of the other skills I gain from all of my other modules put together.”

Participants in the project will take their personal experiences and cascade them to colleagues, which will result in the spread of new ideas and approaches to the teaching of language, but also to teaching in general. Antonio’s work in the area of OERs and student-produced content has become well-known within his institution (Leeds) and he was invited to be part of a committee which discussed, drafted and proposed a policy on OER to the university. This policy has been adopted university-wide

http://wiki.creativecommons.org/University_of_Leeds_Open_Educational_Resources_guidance

and Antonio’s continuing work with open practice has enabled him to have a leading voice in learning and teaching at institutional level.

A selection of OpenLIVES materials has been published on the University of Southampton iTunesU site, with the aim of presenting humanities staff with a model for packaging research and teaching materials as open access, and showcasing the integration of research and teaching work. It is intended that this is part of Southampton’s wider engagement with OER and open practice.

What did we deliver?

At the close of the project, we were able to deliver a rich range of outputs and outcomes.

Outputs:

- A collection of open research data licensed for re-use and adaptation consisting of oral life histories scaffolded with additional notes, images and other support files (such as transcripts and synopses <http://humbox.ac.uk/3790/>)
- A variety of OERs based on the published data including online interactive learning objects, student-produced work and autonomous learning activities. Collected at: <http://humbox.ac.uk/group/2>
- An innovative final year Spanish language module with rationale, teachers' notes, and class activities available as OERs. Collected at <http://humbox.ac.uk/profile/12>
- A suite of videos related to oral history research and collecting the original OpenLIVES interviews <http://humbox.ac.uk/4040/>
- Videoed student reports from the University of Portsmouth describing the process of preparing interactive magazines based on émigré testimony <http://humbox.ac.uk/3672/>
- Example interactive magazines created by students at the University of Portsmouth http://data.axmag.com/data/201205/U15362_F91759/index.html ; http://data.axmag.com/data/201205/U15362_F92081/index.html ; http://data.axmag.com/data/201205/U15362_F92077/index.html
- Videoed team reports from project participants – see collection at: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_3Eq052Eqtg2rdCpIF1RJLxmi3mVNBWo
- A range of dissemination presentations about the project and its work <http://humbox.ac.uk/4182/>
- A video summarising project work and impact: 'The Amazing OpenLIVES Project' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeocSbDlIfKE>

Dissemination and impact on the wider community

Early and on-going dissemination was felt by the team to be important to promote project work and to encourage interaction from the global community. Dissemination of the project aims began immediately via numerous conference presentations in the UK and Spain, and has continued through and beyond the life of the project. Project partners have contributed to two HEA-funded workshops on OERs to share their experiences, and to magazine articles in the UK and Spain.

Project work was disseminated and has had an impact in Spain. Pedro Garcia-Guirao, a research assistant on the project (from the University of Southampton), promoted the project abroad through online networks, and wrote an article about the project for a Spanish journal, 'Open history, open teaching: 'an approach to the project OpenLIVES' (<http://tinyurl.com/btbwlgf>) which has been picked up by blogs and other online sites, e.g. <http://tinyurl.com/d39vewy> and <http://tinyurl.com/cq6cwjs>.

Some of the original interviewees contacted LLAS to wish the project well, and several included further information or links to websites with related information. One interviewee passed news of the project to the Fundación Francisco Largo Caballero, an organisation which carries out historical research into trade unionism, emigration and economics. This organisation kindly sent the project team four books related to the economic history of Spain.

Outcomes and lessons learned:

- **Engaging with OER has the potential to change practice.** Participants in the project all reported that their professional practice had been changed by working on the project, either in the active implementation of new pedagogical techniques and approaches to content delivery; their understanding of how students can be producers of content and active co-creators of knowledge, or their understanding of how content and language teaching (which is usually taught separately) can be integrated by using original research data in language classes.
- **Collaboration through the creation of open content is rich and satisfying and can produce excellent work and curriculum innovation.** The freedom that open practice offers to researchers and teachers working across different institutions to share ideas, practice and experience in their discipline area has been extremely exciting and motivating for the project team. Colleagues working in different institutions do not often have such opportunities to work closely together, and the competitive nature of Higher Education makes such a situation even more unlikely, but open content is proving to be an effective antidote to traditional closed ways of working.
- **Sharing research data as open content can be immensely satisfying and give research a new life in different contexts.** The researcher who originally collected the OpenLIVES testimonies was moved to tears when she saw her colleague (from a different institution) presenting his students' reactions to her work, and their own work which builds upon her research. She was moved by the impact her work had had beyond her own students, as well as impressed with the new directions that the students had taken using the testimonies.
- **The re-use of OERs does NOT lead to sameness or lack of originality in teaching.** The project has demonstrated how one set of research data can be interpreted in widely different, original and exciting ways by different practitioners working in different settings. This reaffirms the importance of individual teachers in delivering quality in Higher Education teaching and rebuts the notion that using third party materials reduces quality, or results in homogeneity of learning experience.
- **Students are very willing to engage in OER production and engage with the issues around open content, such as rights, and they find it motivating to create and share their work.** Engagement with creating and reusing open digital content demands a range of technical, legal and creative skills which are motivating to learn and use in practice. These are skills which are appealing because they can enhance employability.
- **The issue of permissions to publish existing material as open content is a problematic area** which cannot always be solved by approaching original content-owners again to obtain new permissions. A mix of risk evaluation and different risk management techniques need to be taken and probably on a resource by resource basis. The handling of oral testimony demands particular sensitivity due to its personal nature, and content of the testimony should also be considered.
- **Evaluation 'in action' is necessary to capture ongoing processes during the creation and embedding of materials.** Initially, it had been anticipated that while evaluation of day-to-day activities would take place on an on-going basis, the bulk of evaluation of materials would be

at the close of the project. However, as the project team started their work of OER-creation and embedding into teaching, evaluation with students came about through their working with OpenLIVES materials. Students' experiences and comments were recorded by video or email, as were the team's own thoughts and feelings which evolved as the project moved forward. Materials will continue to be monitored and evaluated via web statistics as they are now 'in the wild.'

Conclusions

The OpenLIVES project has preserved important historical data and also done justice to a group of life stories and to the people who lived them. The interviewees were keen to have their stories told and to make their contribution to the historical record, and publishing OpenLIVES data openly will increase the chances of their stories being taken up and used in education more widely.

The project has published data as open content for others to adapt and use; it has built on this content with a range of student-produced resources and tutor-created materials, and it has embedded these OERs into teaching at three different UK institutions. It has demonstrated that the use of open, original research materials can increase creativity and innovation in teaching, and can be a motivating force for students to create high quality content during their studies.

The materials will continue to be hosted on the HumBox and promoted and used by all project participants. There remains a large amount of material still to be published (transcripts, synopses and images) which will be digitised and published over time, and material will be deposited in other repositories too. This will take time, as the project team will continue to embed license information and consider each resource carefully on an individual basis before publication. These are necessary precautions for the publication of life history materials.

Another critical factor for our project has been the willingness of participants to collaborate and share their ideas and work. Without this open attitude, the project would not have achieved so much. For the project team, OpenLIVES has been a "*very important and deep experience*" (Irina Nelson) which has encouraged all of us to re-evaluate how we work. The enthusiasm for this new, open way of teaching and sharing is undiminished, and we will seek to find ways to spread our experiences and to expand on them in new projects and with new audiences.