Marjon Baas

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Mario

This is In Context, the podcast where we delve deeper into educational research. I am Mario de Jonge, educational researcher at ICLON Leiden University. I am sitting here today with doctor Marjon Baas. You can say doctor, because you recently got your PhD. You are an educational advisor at Saxion University of Applied Sciences. And as a postdoc, as a researcher, you are still attached to ICLON. And you recently got your PhD on a dissertation entitled *Open to all, not known to all: sustaining practice with open educational resources in higher education*. So your research focuses mainly on the use of open educational resources. And then in higher education, if I say that correctly.

Marjon

Yes, that's right.

Mario

And then maybe a bit of an open door, but just to start. Most people will know what open educational resources are. Or can imagine them. But just so we really know, that we know exactly what we're talking about. What are open educational resources? What features do these materials have?

Marjon

Yes, a bit like the title of my dissertation: open to all. So learning materials shared with an open licence. Making them accessible to anyone who wants them. In other words, you don't have to pay to own the material, for example. But also that you can use the material however you want to use it. So you could use it yourself in your classes, for example. But you can also put it online or on a website or in a learning environment. And there are no restrictions on that. Furthermore, you may edit the material and make it fit your own context. And yes, the material is actually often shared with an open licence. And the most commonly used open licence is a Creative Commons. Used outside the education sector as well. So it's broader than just education. But that allows you as a user to see what you're allowed to do with the material and how you're allowed to use it.

Mario

Yes, and you say that a Creative Commons licence is also used outside education. Are open educational resources already widely used in education? Are they already widely available online or in other places?

Marjon

Yes. Yes, there are definitely a lot of materials, also for all levels actually of education. Within secondary education, for example, there is VO-Content, which has many materials. Wikiwijs also has a lot of materials. For higher education, there is Edusources, for example, which contains many materials. And beyond that, of course, you also have all kinds of other more international platforms where materials can be found or publications shared under an open licence.

Mario

And just what are the benefits for teachers or for students that those materials exist?

Marjon

Yes, if we look from a student perspective, just one of the big advantages is that they have access to the materials without necessarily having to purchase anything. What you see very much in North America, for example, are zero-cost degrees, so where, for example, students can take a degree programme without any additional cost for all the learning materials they need.

Mario

So the whole programme is just completely open then?

Marjon

Yes, so all the study materials they need consist entirely of open learning materials, so the student doesn't have to incur any extra costs during their studies. Yes, and that's really just to combat that inequality of opportunity. Mainly in North America you see this development very much. Well, in the Netherlands, too, more and more attention is being paid to it, but it is also often aimed at, for example, improving quality or innovation in education. As we know, more and more online or blended education is being offered. Yes, that does mean you need those materials, but developing those materials, if every institution is going to do that itself, yes, that takes a lot of time, but also a lot of expertise. Yes, what you see a lot of now, for example, is that institutions collaborate in this to develop materials, because certainly online blended materials, that takes not only time to develop, but also money to develop.

Mario

Yes, so on the one hand inclusiveness of education, am I saying that right?

Marjon

Yes, definitely.

Mario

Accessibility. And for teachers, it's that, for example, you might be able to share the workload if you develop these kinds of materials. At least, if you collaborate for that.

Marjon

Yes, certainly when developing new teaching. For example, one of the things that came up very much in my research was that it is very difficult to integrate open educational resources into the existing ongoing education, because that requires you to adapt or redesign your education again. While day to day, all sorts of things are obviously at play. But precisely

when developing new education, yes, it is already rethinking what kind of education would we want to make. How are we going to make that? How are we going to offer that? Yes, those are the moments when it turns out that that is preferable to look at what value open educational resources can have for us at those moments.

Mario
Well, my next question was exactly about this. Because it did surprise me. Because as a teacher myself, I have always gratefully used all the materials that were online. Also with the idea: it saves me a lot of time. That I don't have to develop something new. But what I actually saw was, you had one such study in your dissertation where lecturers were even supported by someone from the library, a staff member, who actually pre-selected various materials that might be interesting. So actually a lot of work is already taken out of your hands then. And even then, even though teachers found the materials of reasonably good quality, little of that material found its way into existing education. And I really wondered, why is that?

Marjon
Definitely. I do think one of the things that comes into play is that in that study, we specifically looked at some larger open learning materials. So think about an open textbook. So a textbook that is completely openly available. Or a full online course on a particular subject that students can go through independently, for example. So it was really some larger units of open learning materials. And that requires, if you want to embed that in your real curriculum, slightly more adaptation maybe compared to what you already have in place at the moment in terms of teaching. So yes, it may be that precisely for those smaller open educational resources - a video or smaller self-study material, for example - it is easier to use as supplementary material. And you did see that some materials were referred to as recommended learning materials or if deficiencies had to be eliminated. But if you are really talking about bigger changes in the curriculum of your subject, or maybe of a grade, for instance, then there is more to it. And then it is indeed very difficult, because during the moment that you are teaching, or an existing subject does not necessarily need to be changed, but you want to do so anyway, that creates more barriers for a teacher to do so.

Mario
Yes, I can imagine that. What I also get from your story, I don't know if that's true, but that the material that's there, that those are often just big pieces and that it might be harder to integrate. That if you were to share it modularly, that that might... Or am I oversimplifying it?

Marjon
Well, what became particularly apparent, for example, is that precisely in a teacher's thinking when developing or reusing material, there also needs to be another awareness: when it comes to open learning materials, you don't have to use it *as is*. No, on the contrary, you are allowed to adapt it. You may say, I only use this, or I only use that, or this is okay, but I have to start inserting my own contexts. And what we did see in those conversations. Because the teachers started talking to each other about those open educational resources. It also emerged that this awareness was not yet as such, because people are of course used to working with more commercial materials, for example. And you just use those as they are offered and build your lesson around them. Or you integrate that into your teaching. And

yes, with open learning materials, even if they are in large units, you can see for yourself: what do I use, what do I not use.

Mario

That requires a different mindset.

Marjon

Yes, that requires a different mindset: to look at the materials while assessing whether it fits into your teaching.

Mario

Yes, that's very clear. Your research is mainly about the teacher who is integrating open educational resources as a kind of consumer. But I also think of, what exactly are the reasons for an individual instructor to share his educational resources as open educational resources. Because there have to be, otherwise you might not get involved.

Marjon

One of the reasons for sharing, for example, is: education is entirely funded by public funds. So it is also important to ensure that it is also actually publicly available. That it's not just for those students enrolled within your educational institution. But that you also make the knowledge publicly available. So that it can be accessed by a wider audience.

Mario

We had never really thought about that before. But then you say, it's actually weird not to share it.

Marjon

Yes, definitely. Yes. And in the end, of course, you can make choices as an institution about what do you share and what you don't share. I understand, if we start sharing everything, then you don't know where to look for it either, so to speak. But that you make choices in that. And certainly that you share it anyway with your students within your institution or students in the Netherlands. But you can also share it more broadly. And in addition, what we often hear and what also did come back in the research with the interviews with lecturers, is that lecturers also really enjoy making a broader impact than just the students in their own class. But that they also get reactions from other lecturers or other students from other institutions, who get to work with that material.

Mario

Yes, because then you are talking about recognising and valuing. That's something that obviously comes up in a lot of these research agendas. And I also think it's important. In the field of research, of course, that happens a lot. Because then you can see: hey, I'm having an impact with my research. Because I get quoted so often, for example. But with teaching materials, of course, it is more difficult if you share them. You can get feedback from teachers, which you are just now indicating. Are there ways to make that impact visible too in some way? Because I can imagine it could also be an incentive for teachers to start sharing their teaching materials more.

Marjon

Yes, that's a good question. What is playing out a lot now are the subject communities. Especially within higher education. In which you actually share your subject-specific knowledge as an instructor from your own expertise, within your materials, but also within your practices. So then it transcends the level of purely that we are talking about open educational resources. But it is also about: how can you integrate 'open' into your education. So when you're talking about recognising and valuing, I think it's important that we don't just stick to sharing materials, and how is that used. But also to what extent is openness reflected in education in general. Open educational resources are indeed closely related to open science, open education, open science. And this also includes, for instance, that you integrate openness more into your education. Because today's social issues... There is no escaping the fact that you have to share knowledge openly in order to work together on these issues. And students should actually learn that during their studies. You no longer solve the problems of the future from your own discipline. But also no longer from your own school perspective or maybe including the field of work. So you do have to build on the knowledge that is already there. And so what you also see very much now is, it's called open pedagogy. That students also learn that you can share knowledge openly, share materials openly. But that you can also use what is already available. And that it becomes less like: write a paper, the lecturer assesses it and it ends up in the bin somewhere. And it doesn't actually add anything to social values. And I think you also see this trend very much in higher education. We are moving more and more towards creating social values for society and for the professional field. And that is also a piece of openness that can play a role increasingly, and which can therefore also be reflected in that recognition and appreciation.

Mario

Yes, we are now coming to the end of the conversation. And I wanted to start looking ahead as well. You've already kind of done it in terms of student products. But what I wanted to ask. You've got that dissertation behind you. And you're still doing research now as a postdoc. Again, in the field of open educational resources. So I was wondering maybe you could say something briefly about the project you're doing now. How it connects to what you did for your dissertation.

Marjon

Definitely. What we are doing in the postdoc project is actually: where in my dissertation I focused very much on higher education, in the postdoc project we are currently focusing on secondary education. Because very little is actually known about that. Also internationally, we see that the focus is very much on open educational resources in higher education, because there teachers have a lot of freedom. So it is also, between quotes, easier to integrate it into your teaching. In secondary education, of course, the fact that there are methods, that there are final exams that need to be prepared for and so on just plays a part. So we are currently carrying out a literature study on the one hand to see what is already known on this topic, internationally and nationally. And we are entering into discussions with teachers within secondary education and the questionnaire to look at what are actually motivations for using or not using open educational resources, and what research questions arise from that to create a future agenda from the national developments that are at play.

Mario

Yes. That's a very nice ending to this podcast, I think. A future agenda that will also be made public again I suppose.

Marjon

Certainly.

Mario

Then I would like to thank you very much for participating in this podcast. I hope you enjoyed it. I enjoyed it very much and all the best for the future.

Marjon

Great. Thank you too and nice that I could contribute like this.

Mario

This was In Context. Editing by Carla Den Hartog, music by Robert Loeber. We thank you very much for listening. Do you want to stay up to date? Then subscribe to our podcast. And of course, sharing is very much appreciated.