

13 The OpenLIVES Project: Alternative Narratives of Pedagogical Achievement

Irina Nelson¹ and Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez²

Abstract

This case study presents collaborative work undertaken as part of a project funded by JISC: OpenLIVES (Learning Insights from the Voices of Émigrés from Spain). The aim of this project was to develop Open Educational Resources based on a digital corpus of oral history interviews and archival material collected in the course of an earlier project that researched migrant life histories in contemporary Spain. This case study focuses on how the University of Southampton developed different types of pedagogical intervention which turned undergraduate students from passive consumers of received knowledge into active and reflective producers of educational material that was both central to their own learning and also relevant to a wider academic and non-academic audience. In describing these pedagogical interventions this case study presents a line of work developed at Southampton that not only forges independent and reflective language learners and future professionals but also widens participation and the transmission of knowledge beyond the academic community. Student engagement with open practice was key to these outcomes, and we believe that our experience at Southampton can offer a model of engagement which will be of interest to teachers of language and language area studies.

Keywords: open educational resources, students as producers, innovative teaching, learning approaches, Spanish area studies.

1. University of Southampton, Southampton, UK; irina.nelson@soton.ac.uk

2. University of Southampton, Southampton, UK; apg@soton.ac.uk

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1. Context

This case study presents collaborative work born out of a project funded by [JISC](#) which aimed at developing Open Educational Resources (OER) based on a digital corpus of oral history interviews and archival material. This material had been collected in the course of an earlier project that researched migrant life histories in contemporary Spain called “Tales of Return: The Memories and Experiences of Spanish Returnee Migrants from France and Great Britain (1950s-1990s)”.

Led by the [Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies \(LLAS\)](#) at the University of Southampton (UK), the [OpenLIVES project](#) (Learning Insights from the Voices of Spanish Émigrés), brought together lecturers from Modern Languages Departments at the Universities of Southampton, Leeds and Portsmouth. These project partners used and adapted the corpus in different ways before embedding it in their Spanish curricula. This case study focusses specifically on the work done at the University of Southampton.

The different types of pedagogical interventions developed at the University of Southampton sought to transform undergraduate students from passive consumers of received ‘knowledge’ into active and reflective producers of educational material. The aim was that this material would become central to students’ own learning, and at the same time relevant to the wider academic community and to a non-academic audience.

The development of Open Educational Resources involved undergraduate students of Spanish at beginner and advanced level (first years and finalists), and also final year students from a Spanish Area Studies module: ‘Exiles, Migrants, Citizens: Narrating and Documenting Displacement in Contemporary Spain’. This particular module engages students in critical analysis of a variety of primary and secondary sources that document migration. These sources include personal testimonies, interviews, documentaries, migrant periodical publications and representations of migrants and exiles in various media.

2. Intended outcomes

Broadly speaking, the primary objective of the **OpenLIVES project** was to publish a set of existing research data and to create a set of open educational resources that tutors and students from the three participant institutions could use and reuse. Ultimately, we wanted to show that a corpus of research data collected for a specific project could be put into pedagogical use and be further developed and expanded by participants other than the original researchers for the benefit of a wider academic community. As part of this process, we sought to engage students across the three participant institutions in the creation of the learning materials, and to do so in a way that recreated a real professional environment marked by a spirit of true collaboration.

The project also sought to demonstrate that a single set of research data collected for a specific purpose and discipline can be used in a wide range of different ways within humanities and social science disciplines. We also wanted to contribute meaningfully to the current strategic objectives for Higher Education, such as employability, the enhancement of student learning and digital literacy.

In order to fulfil these objectives, Southampton fostered a “learn by doing” pedagogical approach that promotes the transferability of skills to the professional arena. In the course of the project, for instance, participant students displayed evidence of the successful development of skills in collaborative work related to a variety of relevant professional settings, for example, transcribing and translating material from audio and video interviews prior to dissemination and publication.

These learning processes are exemplified by a particular task that connected the work of Modern Language students from two of the participant universities. This task consisted of the planning of a follow-up interview with one of the original interviewees (a former evacuee child of the Spanish civil war) which was then filmed by staff and students at the University of Portsmouth. Students at Southampton then worked collaboratively to create subtitles for this video, thus transforming it into a learning resource and widening its appeal as a bilingual

OER. The final result is available in the open access repository **Humbox** under a Creative Commons license, which enables students and teachers from all over the world to continue to work with this material and develop it in new, creative ways (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Open access repository Humbox showing some OERs from the OpenLIVES collection, which enables students and teachers from all over the world to reuse and recreate learning material in new creative ways

The screenshot displays the Humbox website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Home, Browse, Forum, About, and Help. A search bar is located on the right, and a 'Login | Create Account' link is on the left. Below the navigation bar, the main content area shows search results. The results are displayed in a table-like format with columns for the resource title, description, and metadata. The resources listed include:

- Interview with Germinal Luis Fernandez - Subtitled in English**: A videoed interview with Spanish child emigre, Germinal Luis Fernandez. It was produced by students and staff at the University of Portsmouth. Subtitles were planned and designed by students at the University of Southampton: Laura Davies, Wes Durdle, Chris Fish and Jonathan Gannon from the University of Southampton.
- Interview in Spanish with Benita Mendiola**: Extract of 3 minutes of a interview of 90 minutes to Benita Mendiola, carried out by students of Unit Exiles, Migrants and Citizens: Narrating and documenting displacement in contemporary Spain. Course Convenor and interviewer: Dr Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez, 2009-2010.
- Preterito o Imperfecto**: Power point created by Ab-initio students of Spanish with sound extracts from an interview to Benita Mendiola, Niña de Rusia. This Power Point illustrates and contrasts the uses of the preterit and imperfect tense in Spanish. This task was a preparation task to complete Assignment 3; an interview.
- Original In-class interview with Benita Mendiola Part 1**: Original In-class interview with Benita Mendiola with students of 11-12-Exiles, Migrants and Citizens: Narrating and documenting displacement in contemporary Spain. Course Convenor and interviewer: Dr Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez.
- Publication and collaboration : publishing open research data and creating teaching resources**: This presentation was given by Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez and Irina Nelson at the 7th annual LLAS elearning symposium, 27th January, 2012. It describes the work of the JISC OpenLIVES project which plans to publish research data as open content, then create and embed OERs relating to that content into teaching.

Each result includes a 'Read more...' link and a 'Tags' section. The interface also features a 'Displaying results 1 to 9 of 9' message, a 'Refine search | New search' link, and a 'Reorder' button. The results are ordered by 'year (oldest first)'.

With regards to language learning specifically, the work done at Southampton aimed at developing tools for language acquisition by embedding the production and use of OERs into the language curriculum. An example of how this was done involved students with a very basic knowledge of the language (beginner

level) working with authentic digitised material to analyse and reflect on the use of different past tenses in Spanish. The evidence of the students' involvement in this respect showed not only full understanding of the use of these verbal forms at the end of the task, but also made evident their ability to produce OERs for their peers in the form of **Power Point presentations** that became language learning and teaching materials (**OERs**).

The authors believe that through these pedagogical interventions developed at Southampton, we have encouraged our students to become independent and reflective language learners, as well as to develop some of the skills they will require in the future as professionals. At the same time, and given the nature of the materials we are working with – the life histories of people who witnessed key moments and processes in the histories of Spain, Britain and Europe (e.g. migrations, exile, wars, political transformations, dictatorship, democratisation, economic crisis) – our student community has contributed to widening participation and has fostered the transmission of knowledge beyond the academic community. In other words, our students have contributed to giving a voice to key protagonists of history from different generations, which can be heard beyond the University campus. Our student engagement with open practice is central to these outcomes, and our experience at Southampton has offered a model of engagement which will be of interest to other Modern Languages tutors and researchers from different disciplines.

3. Nuts and bolts

The key driving principle behind the pedagogical approach of the **OpenLIVES project** was to blur what we saw as an unjustified boundary between the teaching of Language and Content units in the Modern Languages curriculum at Southampton. According to this division, Language units refer to the teaching of Spanish language alone, whereas Content units refer to the teaching of social, cultural and political aspects of the Spanish-speaking world. With this in mind, we did not necessarily wish to change existing practices at our institution but to establish bridges and to integrate Language and Content teaching to make it

more meaningful for the students and to promote the transferability of practical and critical skills between the two.

We therefore worked from the language teaching and socio-historical perspective in order to foster in the students a critical approach to language use in society. At the same time, we wanted the students to critically explore the social and historical contexts of the different periods mentioned in the analysed testimonies. With this we promoted the critical analysis of language in use so that the students could explain the position that the speaker, as active agent in the historical processes, adopted within the social context that marked his/her life experiences. By exploring these contexts in the target language, we not only fostered an in-depth language analysis, but at the same time a critical approach to the understanding of the shifting historical experiences of Spanish society.

Our corpus of 24 interviews amongst Spanish economic migrants and former evacuees from the Spanish Civil War, as well as additional memorabilia, was digitalised and made available for open access in the digital Repository [Humbox](#) by the LLAS OpenLives team. Our students transformed some of these primary data into OERs using video-editing tools, subtitling tools, sound-editing tools ([Windows Movie Maker](#) and [Audacity](#)) and other teaching and learning materials produced in existing units. The resulting OERs would then work as learning-teaching resources that would be available for re-purposing as pedagogical material.

At Southampton, we used existing courses and curricular structures to foster the involvement of our students with the newly digitalised material. While critical assessment in the form of an essay had to be produced individually, other projects such as subtitling or grammatical analysis were developed in groups.

The digitalisation of the primary data was carried out by the Southampton-based [LLAS](#) team with funding provided by [JISC](#) to launch the [OpenLIVES project](#). As well as the digitalisation and dissemination of a vast oral history corpus of testimonial material, the project also digitalised a great part of the contemporary documentation collected in the course of the interviews carried out in the original

research project, such as written memoirs, photographs, press cuttings, drawings and artefacts (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Benita Mendiola (first one from the right) with two other Spanish evacuees in the Soviet Union. Circa 1956



4. In practice: The work of OpenLIVES

The work of OpenLIVES fostered collaborative work amongst lecturers and Spanish language teachers from the other participant institutions, Leeds and Portsmouth. Within Southampton, students' production of OERs was assessed as part of the formative assessment of both Language module and Content modules as discussed above.

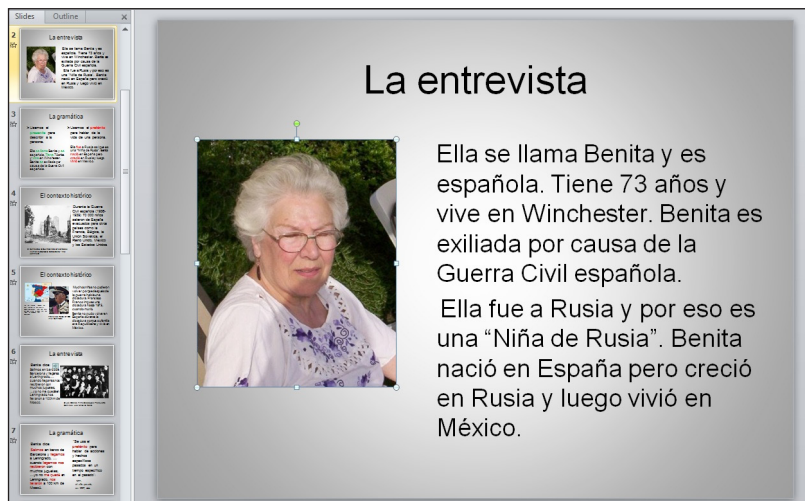
The developments required for the involvement of our students as producers of OERs demanded the creation of specific tasks and mini projects that made us reflect and act on certain issues and deploy specific skills which we outline below:

- Engagement of our students not only in working with ‘authentic’ material but also in putting into practice ‘authentic’ professional skills such as transcribing, synopsis writing, applying linguistic analysis, editing, translating and subtitling. These tasks were successfully completed as practical skills were developed enhancing student motivation as they worked with real scenarios producing purposeful re-usable material (OERs);
- Engagement of the teachers and directors of the project in a wider discussion on the ethics of working with oral/life history testimonies and clearance and copyrights issues: this important question emerged when we felt that we needed to seek continued consent from informants that had previously given their testimonies in the context of a different research project, especially as OpenLIVES was going to make their interview material accessible online. Our students, as co-producers of their learning materials became aware of this vital dimension, signing their own consent forms prior to publishing their own OERs on line;
- The newly created OERs produced by students also included synopses of each digitalised interview produced by final-year students of Spanish at Southampton. The students acquired a new skill in the area of translation and were employed later after graduation as members of the LLAS team to work in a similar role;
- At Southampton we engaged the students from two different pedagogical perspectives: from the language learning perspective via their Language course modules, and from the Content unit perspective, via modules that dealt with socio-cultural and socio-political aspects of the Spanish-speaking world, which require skills such as critical thinking and analysis which are assessed in the form of essays written in English.

From the language learning perspective, the students were engaged through working with grammar at beginners’ level. Their assigned task consisted of documenting the historical context and language use of an extract of an original

interview of a Spanish refugee from the Spanish civil war, who was evacuated to the former Soviet Union. The students produced OERs in Power Point format using digital tools to edit voice and illustrate the language use examples they were presenting. This work is now in Humbox as an [OER](#) to inform other students about language use in a particular historical context in contemporary Spain. Our current student cohort of beginners' Spanish is using the material produced by the previous cohort to inform their production of new OERs to explore Spanish language use at basic level and to inform their contextualisation of the primary data. These activities promote the exploration of Spanish contemporary history by solving a language task ([Figure 3](#)).

Figure 3. Slide from PowerPoint presentation produced by students to learn the simple and imperfect past tenses in Spanish using an audio extract from the life history testimony from Benita Mendiola, Spanish 'child' emigre to the Soviet Union who currently lives in Madrid, Spain



From the perspectives of both language acquisition and political history analysis, the students engaged in a subtitling project. The task demanded that they perform different roles within their group, which they distributed amongst

themselves mimicking how most Translation Companies are organised in the professional world. Part of the task involved learning the operational logic of a translation company. Thus, our students distributed amongst themselves their roles as: Transcribers, Translators, Proof-Readers and Editors.

The translation process required a critical analysis of the political, historical and social context in Spain during the years of the civil war and its aftermath. Their translation strategies depended on their linguistic proficiency as well as their critical historical knowledge of the period. In the course of their work, for instance, they encountered politically-charged words and terms that needed to be faithfully transmitted.

The technical process of the subtitling project required that the pragmatic meaning of the original message in Spanish was expressed in less than 75 characters in two lines per visual frame; however, meaningful semantic units could not be separated and this presented a challenge that was successfully overcome. A new sophisticated skill was thus successfully acquired by our students. The final product is of high professional standards and has been made available as an [OER in Humbox \(Figure 4\)](#).

In terms of new roles, we can say that overall, our participant students have developed new roles as producers of published OERs. By this we mean that they have become not only producers of their own learning materials, but also co-researchers and even contributors to current commemorative practices and events, where they themselves become witnesses of historical processes. For example, a group of students participated as volunteer helpers in the 75th Anniversary Commemoration of the arrival of nearly 4,000 Basque evacuee children to Southampton in 1937 which was held at the University of Southampton on 11-12 May 2012. By attending and working at this event, our students became social agents in their own right, and witnesses of a historical process that links the past with the present. Aware of this special role conferred to them by their active participation, they agreed to record their experience and interaction with the former evacuees in interviews carried out by Pedro García-Guirao, a PhD student at Southampton. These interviews, which document the

impact of their engagement in this event in their own personas, as students, as members of the community and as researchers, are now a new **OER** that can be accessed at **Humbox**.

Figure 4. Subtitled interview of Germinal, former evacuee child of the Spanish Civil War as a resource produced and transformed by students and currently accessible in Humbox



The screenshot shows the HumBox website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Home, Browse, Forum, About, Help, and a search bar. Below the navigation bar, the main content area displays the title "Interview with Germinal Luis Fernandez - Subtitled in English". The video player shows an elderly man with the subtitle "...are you still in touch with the other child exiles?". To the right of the video player, there is a "Description" section with text about the video being produced by students and staff at the University of Portsmouth. Below the video player, there is a "Download" button and a section for "Associated Groups" featuring the OpenLIVES logo. At the bottom, there is a "Resource details" section with information about the resource's creation and contributors.

5. Conclusion

OpenLives has generated alternative narratives of pedagogical engagement that challenge some academic assumptions in unexpected and perhaps necessary ways. First, the collaborative scope of the project surpassed all our expectations in terms of outputs and personal learning. Colleagues from the three partner universities used the corpus of testimonies in ways that we could not have

envisaged when the material was first collected as raw ‘data’. Building on the methodology of the initial project (Tales of Return) and on drawing an oral history research tradition well established in its Modern Languages Department, the team in Southampton developed learning tools that provide a model of research-led teaching and learning that puts migrant life histories at the core of both language and content courses. This transcends what some of us have regarded for some time as an unfounded subject division. Blurring the traditional boundaries of language and content curricula in this way challenges two long-held assumptions: 1) that language teaching has no significant content and 2) that content teaching should not prioritise language use.

Second, the engagement of students in the process of digitalisation and transformation of the data has been extraordinary in terms of level of commitment and quality of outputs. The idea of ‘the student as producer’ captivated the imagination of the team from the start. In an educational setting dominated by the mantra of ‘employability’ there is no better way to learn than by doing and engaging in authentic and relevant activities. Working together tutors and students have revitalised and disseminated the original material in creative and hopefully enduring ways.

A third benefit that can be extracted from the testimonial nature of the [OpenLives project](#) has to do with the very nature of oral history, empowering and revealing as it is of alternative historical interpretations. Being exposed to them has encouraged all participants to consider their own personal positioning (cultural, national, generational, political) within a wider global context where narratives of migration are part of a historical continuum.

Finally, the project has opened up our ‘pedagogical minds’ to the idea that open access can contribute significantly to the democratisation of learning and in doing so undermine what many academics in the UK see as the increasing commodification of education. Through dissemination under Creative Commons Licencing the testimonial corpus at the heart of OpenLives has become organic, subject to continuous development and enrichment by different constituencies of users which may include the protagonists of these migration stories and

their descendants. The interdisciplinary dimension and the intergenerational dissemination scope of the OERs are key strengths that can be developed further. At present, lecturers, teachers and students in higher, secondary and further education, as well as the public at large, can use and learn from the material created. They can do so from the perspective of a multiplicity of disciplines (history, narratology, linguistics, sociology, film, politics...) and they can continue to develop it in unforeseeable ways, adapting it to ever changing social, migrational and educational contexts.

By digitalising and making accessible this material to the public we are finally being honest to the people who generously shared their life histories for the purpose of knowledge generation and transmission. Making the collaborative work ethic that underpins it sustainable in the long term is the next challenge.

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Resources

Audacity tutorial: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/manual-1.2/index.html>

Windows Movie Maker tutorial: <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-gb/windows-vista/getting-started-with-windows-movie-maker>

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