14 Discovering Spanish Voices Abroad in a Digital World

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Abstract

This case study describes and assesses the Open Practice module *Discovering Spanish Voices Abroad in a Digital World*, one of the pedagogical applications of the JISC project OpenLIVES, which digitised Oral History interviews of Spanish migrants in the HumBox repository. This case study pays specific attention to learner production of Open Educational Resources. Through the process of production, learners developed their critical and practical understanding of Oral History and Migration by working with OpenLIVES interviews and other OER. Learners also carried out interviews with new research informants, produced their own audio documentaries on Spanish migration based on old and new interviews and finally published their outputs as OER. This case study demonstrates how the learners fulfill a virtuous circle of skills acquisition, meaningful learning and knowledge transfer, as they reuse OER and share their own research data, insights and knowledge with the open global community in OER repositories. Student generated materials were then added to the original collection of resources. The teacher offers a scaffolding of learning activities, team-work, support and feedback that enables the learners to make the most of this real life and ethical experience, whilst benefiting the wider community and giving the narratives of the migrants the credit they deserve.

Keywords: migration, oral history, documentaries, OER, interviews, research.

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1.   Context

Discovering Spanish Voices Abroad in a Digital World is a Spanish language in context module for Advanced learners. It started to be taught in October 2012 as a 4th Year option for all the University Degrees in Spanish at the University of Leeds. It is worth 20 credits (1/6 of a full-time year).

Figure 1.   OpenLIVES open learning resource in the HumBox containing an interview[1]

This module was conceived as part of OpenLIVES project (Learning Insights from the Voices of Émigrés from Spain). One of the main outputs delivered by OpenLIVES is a collection of 19 digitised life story interviews featuring Spanish émigrés who left Spain between the end of the 1930's and the 1960's (Figure 1). Thanks to this project, the interviews, along with other ephemera, are available as OER in the HumBox repository. Such primary research data on migration can be used in the teaching of history, politics, economics, sociology, etc, and not only Languages and Area Studies. The other main set of outputs

1. Retrieved from http://humbox.ac.uk/3787/.

delivered by OpenLIVES is a series of suites of educational resources based on the re-use of the digitised life story interviews.

Figure 2.   Collection of open learning resources
produced by teachers and students
in the Leeds module[1]

The module presented in this case study is the main OpenLIVES pedagogical application developed at the University of Leeds. There is a designated Collection of Resources (Figure 2) produced for this module both by the tutor and the students in the HumBox. This collection will grow with successive additions, as the module is intended to run on a permanent basis and will incorporate the research outputs of students of successive cohorts. A Year 1 Leeds OpenLIVES Collection in HumBox has been created for learners on other Spanish modules (Martínez-Arboleda, 2013d).

The OpenLIVES final year module fits in very well in the new University of Leeds Curriculum, which has been developed as part of the Curriculum Enhancement

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1. University of Leeds (2013). Retrieved from http://humbox.ac.uk/4050/.

Project, in different ways: it promotes synoptic learning because it integrates skills and knowledge previously acquired across different subject areas; it incorporates a strong element of generic and subject-specific transferable skills, in an active and authentic way; and it promotes "research-based" teaching, which, according to the categorisation established by Healey and Jenkins (2009) in "Developing undergraduate research and enquiry", enables students to be the protagonists of their own research. In this respect, the contribution made by this course to Critical Pedagogy and the connections to the University of Lincoln Student as Producer Pedagogy have been explored by the author in the article "Liberation in OpenLIVES Critical Pedagogy: "empowerability" and critical action" (Martínez-Arboleda, 2013a).

2.   Intended outcomes

The teaching in the OpenLIVES module is underpinned by a detailed agenda in the fields of Open Practice, Socio-constructive Learning, Task-based Learning and Ethical Learning. Its main goal is to support students in their production of the following two outputs:

- A series of brand-new life story interviews with Spanish economic migrants who live in Leeds. These interviews are conducted in Spanish by the students (one interviewee per each three students). They are meant to be digitised and shared as OER by the students themselves in the HumBox and in Jorum, the national UK OER repository, at the end of the course, although they are carried out half way through the course. These outputs are not formally assessed.

- A 2,500 words (around 20 minutes) audio documentary in Spanish, one per student, to be submitted in its final version at the end of the course. The documentary incorporates soundtracks from the original OpenLIVES collection of interviews as well as from any new interviews conducted by the students themselves. The draft script of the documentary counts 40% towards the overall mark of the module

and the second and final version, submitted in an audio file following feedback on the draft script, counts 30%.

Ultimately, this module is aimed at enabling students to become responsible digital scholars. At the end of the course, students should feel prepared to make tangible and socially purposeful contributions to the Global Community. In order to fulfil this greater goal and support student production, the module intends to provide students with skills in the following areas:

- oral history interviewing and coding (research methods);

- documentary scripting and production, including using the software Audacity;

- OER literacy, including publishing and licensing;

- team work and project management;

- Spanish language for specific purposes.

The module also promotes critical and ethical understanding of all the social, epistemological and educational issues connected to the research and production work carried out by students. This means that the teaching programme also touches upon the following areas:

- OER and open practice from a social, educational and political point of view;

- economic migration in Spain in the 21st century, mainly in comparison with 1960's economic migration;

- the economic, political and social situation in contemporary Spain;

- ethical protocols for research;

- oral history, from a social, scientific and ethical point of view;

- modes of expression and the documentary genre.

Half way through the course, before the interviews, students write a 750-word research report explaining and justifying, academically, their next steps in the research project, namely the interviews and the documentaries. After the interviews have been carried out, students report again, this time 10 minutes orally, on their research progress. These two pieces of work are assessed and count 15% of the overall mark for the module each.

Figure 3.   OpenLIVES cycle in the Leeds module[1]
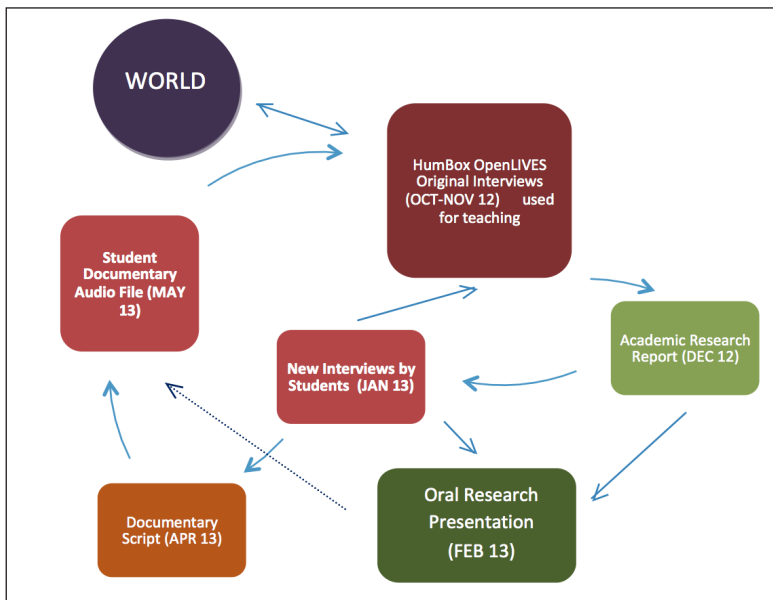
The diagram in Figure 3 above shows the flows and feeds of the research production and knowledge transfer cycle that takes place in the module. Its

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1. Retrieved from http://revistacaracteres.net/revista/vol2n1mayo2013/liberation-in-openlives-critical-pedagogy-empowerability-and-critical-action/.

final outcomes (the interviews, the teaching materials and the documentaries) incorporate the research and reflections of the students and the teacher, including the feedback. The ultimate goal is to incorporate the new interviews and the documentaries produced by students into the HumBox OpenLIVES collections and Jorum. Feedback is always provided before students move on to the next steps.

3.   Nuts and bolts

The module requires a great degree of readiness to broaden one's professional scope and involve other colleagues in its preparation and delivery. At first sight this is simply a Language in Context module with a strong component of Open Practice. However, as soon as the work unfolds, the teacher will feel the need and desire to learn about subjects that traditionally are not related to language teaching such as Oral History, Research Methods and Research Ethics.

Life history research in educational settings: learning from Lives (Goodson, 2001) is one of the core readings. It introduces students to the practical aspects of Oral History Methodology in an intellectually inspiring way. Penny Summerfield (2011) also provides, with her insightful lecture, a firm grounding for students' critical understanding of the purpose and methods of Oral History: This distinct discipline is an alternative way to "traditional" academic history for constructing the past through life stories. In Oral History interviews, the interviewee is on the driving seat of his/her own narrative. The research agenda of the interviewer should not shape the outcome of the interview and is somehow tacitly negotiated during the interview. Crucially, Oral History is ethically underpinned by the utmost respect to the individuals' lives and their narrative choices. Therefore it is important that students in this module understand the differences between qualitative research methods interviews and life story (Oral History) interviews as well as the points in common. In the Collection of Resources produced for this module, readers can find the materials that have been used for the teaching of Qualitative Research Methods and Oral History.

Equally, the boundaries between journalist interviews and life story (Oral History) interviews must be set very clearly when producing the documentaries, in which extracts from life story interviews are to be used. That is why during the second part of the module, once the interviews have been carried out and processed, students learn about aural genres, journalistic reporting and academically produced history for wider audiences.

When it comes to supporting students ahead of their writing-up of the script for the documentary, there is a great emphasis on their freedom to choose their target audience and the ways in which they would engage with it. Students are encouraged to reflect upon different formats and are allowed to challenge established documentary genres if they wish so, always in a purposeful way. At the same time, since the documentary incorporates extracts from life story interviews, students have to respect the spirit of the narration of the interviewees when building their own narrative in the script. All the interviewees' statements used for the documentary have to maintain the original meaning and sense when incorporated into it. There is a useful list of resources and readings on documentaries, genres and history dissemination in the HumBox (Martínez-Arboleda, 2013b).

Finally, the OER publication and licensing is taught in a very traditional way: the different licenses and their purpose are explained; students' practical understanding of their meaning and functions is tested; the concept of OER "quality" in relation to different uses and users is discussed, following the work of Kelty, Burrus and Baraniuk (2008); and a critical overview of the available repositories for dissemination of their interviews and documentaries is also offered.

4.   In practice

Before the teaching started, the module leader had to seek ethical approval for the Oral History research that would be carried out by the students. This involved filling in a form in which the purpose of the project and the methodology are

explained to the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty. In the form, the module leader must also provide details of how research participants are going to be recruited, what written information is going to be given to the potential participants who respond to the advert, what consent forms the participants will be signing and how all the data obtained is going to be stored or disseminated. This type of ethical review procedure is very common in research projects, less so as part of teaching.

This application for ethical approval process is an essential part of the work of any researcher when working with human subjects in a real life experience. For anyone intending for the first time in their careers to offer their students the opportunity of carrying out this type of research, filling the form is a very formative and almost essential experience. In fact, the application form for ethical approval itself and the relevant correspondence with the Research Ethics Committee, which includes the letter granting approval, have been used as learning materials for the students. Nothing can beat authenticity and transparency, particularly if the idea is that students carry out their research with a good deal of autonomy. By sharing and discussing all this information with students, they acquire ownership of the research project. From that point in the course, any other documentation for the project has to be produced by the team. In the case of this module, students discussed and drafted the consent forms in two languages and created and distributed the advert for potential participants. The text of the email to be sent to individuals showing an interest to participate in the research was also drafted by the students. In all cases, the tutor reviewed and edited as appropriate. The consent forms and other related documents have been published as an OER in the Collection of Resources of the module in HumBox.

In order to scaffold all the learning in the module, the sessions had to be varied in their format and delivery throughout the course: from lectures to project management meetings, language learning workshops and seminars. Each one of the sessions is almost unique in its approach and methodology because the content and the skills are diverse and the main student-produced output is relatively complex.

During January 2013 two life story (Oral History) interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed by the students. The interviewees, two young people from Spain who now live in Leeds were interviewed separately. The contents of the interviews are hugely interesting and revealing, both as personal stories and as true snapshots of the life, problems and expectations of economic migrants, often misconstrued by the media. They can be used for the study of a wide range of topics and certainly for advanced language work. Both participants agreed to publish, as OER, the full audio file and the transcripts under their real names. Student produced interviews and documentaries can be found in the Collection of Resources.

The publication of these interviews by the students, as well as the ensuing documentaries, only takes place between the end of the course, in May, and the graduation of the student, in July. The reason is that it is felt at this stage that the students who conducted and transcribed the interviews and produced the documentaries should only give their consent and share the resources once the course is finished and the results have been published and before they officially cease to be students. There are powerful ethical and educational reasons behind this decision. There should not be pressure on students for them to publish something that they later may regret having shared, particularly if they may have done it to please their OER-enthusiast tutor.

5.   Conclusion

One of the interesting features of this module is that it can be downsized or reshaped by combining the different components at ease. Also, this course has been delivered almost exclusively with OER and other free access online resources. The Research Methods materials of Learning from WoerK (University of Plymouth) hosted in Jorum proved very useful. There are also key materials from the Universities of Manchester, Leicester and Huddersfield and from different academics and organisations in Spain, UK and Argentina that can be found online, as it can be seen in the Collection of Resources.

Student Open Practice in this course has played a crucial role. Many key decisions in the course are taken by the students in conjunction with the tutor. Students shared their interim research reports and worked in teams in a wide range of tasks. In this context of collaboration, a student from Communication Studies at the University of Leeds decided to help the students in the OpenLIVES module. He shared with them, internally, his assessed coursework: a radio documentary on recent Spanish economic migration in the UK.

The most distinctive feature of OpenLIVES in relation to other OER and OP is that it has penetrated in several areas that are outside the traditional scope of OER and OP studies, hence introducing OER and OP to "non-OER" tutors and academics. OpenLIVES has contributed to current debates about the role of students in Higher Education and research-based teaching and on the integration of language and cultural content. OpenLIVES has also initiated other debates on issues such as the purpose of student coursework, student production of OER, redefinition and integration of "employable" skills ("empowerability") or the role of Oral History in Higher Education.

There has been a great interest in this module as well as on the other OpenLIVES pedagogical applications at Southampton and Portsmouth. The number of scholarly presentations and articles on the OpenLIVES Pedagogy continues to grow (Martínez-Arboleda, 2013c). Successive cohorts of students at Leeds, and hopefully beyond, will be incorporating more and more resources to this collection. The author has received enquiries from teachers and researchers who want to explore further this open methodology as well as very promising feedback from existing and potential informants and students.

The involvement of Dr Javier López Alos, visiting fellow at the University of Leeds, in the delivery of one session on Spanish Migration in the 1960's and his selection of key audiovisual materials enriched greatly the course too.

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Useful links

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