Open EdTech 2009
A Call to Action

Introduction

Create the university of the future. This was the goal of the forty leaders in open education and technology who met in Barcelona on October 19-20, 2009, at the Open EdTech Summit sponsored by the Open University of Catalunya and the New Media Consortium. Together, this group considered the question of how to design educational institutions that fully embrace open education as means of being truly responsive to the needs of contemporary society and of today's students.

This key question springs from a similar discussion that took place last year at Open EdTech 2008. During that summit, the group examined the question of what it means to be educated in the 21st century. (For additional information on the results of that discussion, please see the *Open EdTech 2008 Report*, available at http://bit.ly/5yT31). To complement the work of last year, we considered how to achieve the ability to support the kind of education envisioned at the 2008 summit.

Thought Experiment

A simple thought experiment set the context for the group's thinking. A scenario was described in which a developing country set out to establish a new kind of university — one free from preconceptions or official constraints about how it would operate. The mandate of this new university was to provide an excellent education in an environment of open access, built on four key ideas:

1. Access to high-quality education should be available to all, and open content is a key part of providing such access.
2. Informal learning and mentoring are effective and well-proven approaches to engaging with youth and stimulating critical thought.
3. Personalized learning is critical to student success, but will require learning standards that allow students to continue their learning wherever life takes them.
4. Tools such as digital video, mobile devices, social media, and the global network all have important roles in learning and should be available to all learners.

Summit attendees played the part of expert advisors working with the rector of this new university. The thought experiment was to use this frame to consider essential elements of a strategic plan — action steps — that could achieve these goals. Working both in plenary and in small breakout groups of about ten people each, attendees considered the challenges from several perspectives. The working groups were supported by a special wiki (http://oet.wiki.nmc.org; an appointed scribe captured the discussion there, where it was available throughout the meeting — and remains available as the record of our work. Additionally, one person in each group was given the task of submitting updates via Twitter, marking each update with a special tag to make it easy to find. In this way, the conversation

among each small group was connected to that of the others; the stream of comments was displayed on screens in the breakout rooms as they appeared. (The archived Twitter stream for the summit is available at http://twapperkeeper.com/oet09/.) As each group reported on its recommendations, a visual facilitator captured the discussion on large charts; the charts themselves became tools used by the group as they ranked the possible action steps and sorted out those that were most important. Images of these charts can be seen on the project wiki.

A Call to Action
During the small group breakouts, summit attendees generated fifty action items that could be taken right now to help realize the goal of creating an institution that can meet the needs of students today and into the foreseeable future, and then ranked them.. Those which ranked highest are captured here, and framed as a Call to Action — five major tasks that are perceived as critical to meeting the needs of students:

> ***1. We must encourage the reuse and remixing of rich media.*** In order to achieve this, it must be easier to find, use, and cite pieces of media, especially for educational purposes. Contextual tools that perform these tasks, co-developed by students as the end-users, must be created and made available to all. We must also develop ways to translate rich media, not only between languages, but also between modalities, such that content produced in a certain geographical area and medium may be accessed and reused in other places and in other forms. Portability of rich media is key; content must not be tied to a certain platform for delivery, nor to a specific medium or environment.

> ***2. We must embrace the full promise of mobile devices as learning platforms.*** Mobiles — not simply phones, but all kinds of handheld and portable devices — are a powerful tool for learning because they are controlled by the holder. With mobile devices, users can direct their own learning experiences, accessing information where and when they need it. It is critical that we effect a paradigm shift toward recognizing mobiles as a primary platform for delivery of educational content — not content that is translated for use on mobiles, but content that is designed for such use from the outset. We must actively encourage development practices that remove platform dependence. Likewise, we must advocate for a global mobile network that is as easy to use, as inexpensive, and even more ubiquitous than the web.

> ***3. We must award credentials based on learning outcomes.*** It is time to recognize the learning that occurs outside of courses and beyond classroom walls. The model of awarding credentials solely on the basis of participation in established programs must give way to a more flexible design that separates credentials from coursework and recognizes mastery regardless of where or how it is attained. As more learners choose alternate means of education, including non-university programs, mentoring, apprenticeship, and other informal or innovative options, we must accept and recognize their achievements as equivalent to those gained in more traditional ways.

4. We must enable a culture of sharing. Recognizing that the sharing and reuse of scholarly work is a key component of the university of the future, we advocate building a culture of sharing in which concerns about intellectual property, copyright, and student-to-student collaboration are alleviated and the model of proprietary work dissolves in favor of a more open one. To this end, we must establish reward structures that support the sharing of work in progress, ongoing research, highly collaborative projects, and scholarly publications of all kinds, including reputation systems, peer review processes, and new models for citation of such content. We must empower students to share knowledge with one another in ways that are viewed as collaboration rather than cheating. Assessment models must change to support these practices. Ultimately, we see a culture of sharing as a crucial piece of the infrastructure of a scalable educational system that can support the millions of learners who will participate in it.

5. We must take care that open resources include the context that will enable its use and understanding. Content out of context is at best easy to misconstrue, and at worst, too difficult to use. Content producers and users alike must embrace strategies (reflective blogging, metadata, documentation of process, visualization of learning, etc.) for linking content generation to "pedagogical wraparounds" that embed content within effective learning practices. Such strategies would ensure that the focus remains on learning objectives and process, rather than on the technology used to deliver the learning materials.

As noted at the outset, more than 50 action steps were identified. The task of reinventing higher education is complex, and the road to change long. Institutions change by degree, and it must become part of our culture to embrace our collective knowledge and wisdom when it comes to designing learning experiences. We must begin to recognize the utility and value of informal avenues of learning, self-directed learning, and the new forms of mentorship made possible via the network and social media. We must encourage thoughtful experimentation at all levels, including the formation of whole new forms of institutions.

Next Steps

With this Call to Action, we issue a challenge to educators and educational institutions everywhere: to take a hard look at current practice in light of these action steps, and to encourage, even demand, changes that will transform the academy.

This Call to Action summarizes the major findings of the 2009 Open EdTech Summit; the full breadth of the work will be captured in a monograph and broadly distributed so that others may share in the conversation — with the hope that these reasoned reflections will prove useful catalysts for dialog. The ultimate goal is to continue the conversations and to create a starburst of reflection and experimentation that will help to solve the challenges that have been laid out here.