

Finding v. developing good open content for education

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Tom Hoffman, [Bootstrapping Open Curricula: A Practical Proposal](#), eSchool News, March 20, 2006. Excerpt:

There is a lot of talk about generating curricula using open source methodologies, that is, roughly, allowing free distribution of curriculum materials while inviting outside contributions to the work, both on the [grassroots level](#) and engaging some [big guns like IBM and the Hewlett Foundation](#). While I'm certainly philosophically supportive of these ideas and initiatives, I haven't seen anything yet that is sufficiently grounded in practical experience with either open source software development or curriculum design to get very far off the ground....

[T]o get high quality open curriculum, we need one of two things. One route is to wait for a cadre of latter-day [Nancie Atwell](#) cum Linus Torvalds figures who will create ongoing bodies of work on the web under open licenses....I don't have any particularly bright ideas at this point for facilitating that process in the short term.

The second route would be to find some curriculum currently under a proprietary license that might be a good candidate for re-licensing under an open content license. Let me give you an example of a good candidate of this process. Ideally, it would be an innovative curriculum developed in a partnership between leading academics and classroom teachers that represents the best practices, tested over a period of years. It should have a deep philosophical underpinning, so the project maintains a consistent focus....It should be savvy in its approach to media and technology, thus of interest to the teachers most likely to be attracted to open content online. A likely candidate would also have recently fallen out of print, having prematurely succumbed to changing pedagogical fashion and politics. The chunk of curriculum initially released should be around a year's worth; enough to unfold a complete, coherent sequence but not more than a first wave of readers and contributors can wrap their heads around. A nice vision, but could we find such a thing? Happily, yes. I submit to you [Pacesetter](#), a set of capstone courses for high school seniors in English, Math and Spanish launched in 1993 by the [College Board](#) as an alternative to their AP courses and, from what I can tell from their website, essentially shut down last year....

What we need now is some of the institutions that are gabbing about this stuff, foundations like Hewlett and corporations like IBM, to step up to the plate and make a proposal to The College Board to open up the Pacesetter curriculum. There are lots of plausible models for this. The most obvious one is probably Sun's StarOffice/OpenOffice.org setup. The College Board could maintain the Pacesetter trademark and sole rights to offer Pacesetter assessments. The curriculum materials would be turned over to a non-profit who would put them on the web under a different name under a [Creative Commons](#) license. The College Board would always have the option to fold contributed materials back into Pacesetter and revive it as a commercial product and assessment if they chose to do so. There is no reason this can't happen. It makes perfect sense.