

Growth of open education resources

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Greg Toppo, [Free online materials could save schools billions](#), USA Today, November 7, 2007.

Excerpt:

Since March, Dixon Deutsch and his students have been quietly experimenting with a little website that could one day rock the foundation of how schools do business.

A K-2 teacher at Achievement First Bushwick Elementary Charter School in Brooklyn, N.Y., Deutsch, 28, has been using [Free-Reading.net](#), a reading instruction program that allows him to download, copy and share lessons with colleagues.

He can visit the website and comment on what works and what doesn't. He can modify lessons to suit his students' needs and post the modifications online: Think of a cross between a first-grade reading workbook and Wikipedia....

If Deutsch wants to see a lesson taught by someone who already has mastered it, he clicks on a YouTube video linked to the site and sees a short demo. "I find it's more teacher-friendly than a textbook," he says.

Oh, and it's free.

Colleges for years have tapped open-source materials....But the idea has been slow to make a mark in the less technologically savvy K-12 world.

That may soon change. Websites such as [hippocampus.org](#) offer free materials tied to high school textbooks, and several college-level open-source projects are trickling down to K-12 schools.

The California-based William and Flora Hewlett Foundation is funding K-12 open-source projects worldwide....

But perhaps the most significant development is at the most elementary level. Last fall, a Florida textbook adoption committee approved Free-Reading....Florida is one of the top five textbook markets in the USA, so its move could lead to the development of other free materials that might someday challenge the dominance of a handful of big educational publishers....

Could Free-Reading offer a glimpse of the future, when big, bulky — and expensive — textbooks go the way of the film strip?

[Adam Newman of Eduventures] thinks so. "This is a shot across the bow for a lot of people," he says.

Schools spent \$4.4 billion for textbooks in the 2006-07 school year, according to Eduventures. While that's only about 1% of total expenditures, the prospect of free, state-approved materials could profoundly influence how schools spend money — and what publishers offer, Newman says.

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"If suddenly you don't have to spend \$100 million every four years on textbooks, it's not found money, but certainly it's money that could be applied to other kinds of educational endeavors." ...