

Why open education needs open access

Peter Suber

Published September 5, 2007

Citation

Suber, P. (n.d.). In *Open Access News*. Open Access News. <https://doi.org/10.63485/vr4wk-c6g83>

Copyright

Copyright © Peter Suber 2007. Distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

I mentioned [last week](#) that Gavin Baker would be a [guest blogger on open education and open access](#) at [Terra Incognita](#).

His post appeared today: [Open Access Journal Literature is an Open Educational Resource](#). It starts with a good intro to OA for those who are already familiar with FOSS. This excerpt starts after that intro:

...Here are four reasons why advocates of [OERs](#) [Open Educational Resources] should support [OA journal literature](#):

- 1. [As direct learning content in tertiary education](#)*
- 2. [As "outside-the-classroom" learning content](#)*
- 3. [As learning content for self-learners](#)*
- 4. [As "raw materials" for re-use in free learning content](#)*

1. Journal literature as direct learning content, particularly in tertiary education

As long as professors assign readings from scholarly journals, learning content will not be fully free if the journal literature is not free....

Who profits when students pay [for coursepacks containing journal articles]? The copy center or book store will receive a portion. Another portion may go to a rights licensing middleman, such as the [Copyright Clearance Center](#). But most of the revenue will go to the article's copyright holder – which, as a rule, is the journal publisher, not the article's author.

Open access cuts out these middlemen: once peer review and editing have been performed, and the article has been published, the article is forever free to the world for educational use.

Other approaches to circumventing the middlemen will not prove as sustainable a solution as [OA](#):

- Relying on fair use as legal grounds to distribute copies of the articles to students is [a perilous position](#).*
- E-reserves are [similarly problematic](#).*
- "Virtual coursepacks," which link to copies of the articles in electronic databases via the institution's library subscriptions, only shift the cost from students to libraries....*

2. Journal literature as indirect or "outside-the-classroom" learning content

Journal literature is often encountered in educational contexts other than where an article has been assigned for reading.

Most commonly, a tertiary student will consult journal literature as a source for coursework. Tertiary students are frequently assigned to write research papers which cite articles from scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed journals. The process of conducting this search, filtering and reviewing relevant literature is an educational process. Broad access to this literature enhances the student's education. Unfortunately, as long as scholarship is

disseminated on a "toll-access" basis, some students will be priced out of access. This is particularly notable for students at educational institutions in developing countries....

3. Journal literature as learning content for self-learners

If one considers education as [lifelong learning](#), then journal literature must be acknowledged as learning content with great value for self-learners.

Many parents of children with uncured diseases have an unquenchable thirst for information about the condition – particularly for rare diseases which receive little coverage in the mainstream press. Journal articles which report original research are of incredible value to help parents understand their child's condition. Unfortunately, many of these parents express frustration with obtaining access to relevant literature. (Many organizations which represent these parents are members of the [Alliance for Taxpayer Access](#) for this very reason.)

Less dramatically, newspapers report daily on the latest findings of scientists and health research. Usually, the coverage reports findings originally published in a peer-reviewed journal. But the curious reader who desires to read the original paper himself is frequently stymied, not having a subscription to the journal. (For a light-hearted example to the contrary, see [this recent article](#) from the Daytona Beach News-Journal, which points readers to an [article deposited in the arXiv](#).)

Going a step further, consider that prized tool of self-learners, [Wikipedia](#). Imagine if each Wikipedia article on a scientific subject was fully referenced (a [goal](#) of the project). Imagine further that each citation linked to a freely-available copy of a relevant journal article. Those links would prove tremendously valuable to the self-learner who aspires to deepen his understanding of the topic.

Beyond access barriers, removing permission barriers opens even more possibilities: [translation](#), [summary](#), [annotation and commentary](#), to name a few.

4. Journal literature as "raw materials" for re-use in free learning content

OA journal articles can be cited in free textbooks, listed as recommended reading at the end of a textbook chapter, included as learning modules (with or without annotation, translation, summary, etc.), or repurposed for use in other learning content (need a graph or illustration? Just borrow it!).

OA journal literature represents a broad body of scholarly-quality content, without price or permission barriers, available for re-use to enrich [OERs](#)....