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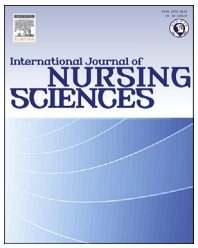

REVIEW

Digital resources for nursing education: Open courseware and massive open online courses

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ABSTRACT

Open Courseware (OCW) and massive open online courses (MOOCs) are teaching and learning resources that are easily accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. OCW is digitally published learning content including full and partial courses (syllabi, outlines, lectures in pdf or video, slides, reference lists, etc.), simulations, animations, tutorials, drills and practices, modules, podcasts, case studies, and quizzes. This content is free and can be adopted or adapted to the user's needs. MOOCs are online learning experiences taught by university professors using conventional educational tools including video lectures, interactive modules, assignments, study materials, discussion boards, quizzes and tests. MOOCs are offered free or at low cost for personal and professional learning, and as a supplement to classroom teaching. Many MOOCs and OCW focus on topics of interest to nursing, particularly to nurse educators. This article provides the reader with a brief history of the development of OCW and MOOCs, conceptual descriptions, and guidance about how to access and use these new online resources.

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1. Introduction

This article focuses on two types of educational resources: open courseware (OCW) and open online courses (MOOCs). OCW consists of digitally published learning content including full and partial courses (syllabi, outlines, lectures in pdf or video, slides, reference lists, etc.), simulations, animations, tutorials, drills and practices, modules, podcasts, case studies, quizzes and tests. OCW is free of cost to educators, students and self-learners over the globe. OCW is available with few restrictions, enabling educators to copy, change and reuse these resources [1,2]. MOOCs are cohesively presented online learning experiences taught by university professors using conventional educational tools including video lectures, interactive modules, assignments, study materials, discussion boards, quizzes and tests. MOOCs are offered free or at low cost, but copying and re-use are often restricted by copyright [3].

Both of these educational resources have evolved as part of the Open Educational Resource (OER) movement, first articulated in 2002 at a conference hosted by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The OER movement endorses the free sharing of educational resources worldwide [4].

This article provides the nurse educator, researcher or practitioner with a brief history of the development of OCW and MOOCs and guidance about how to use OCW and MOOCs to enhance both personal and students' learning experiences. Other digital educational resources (such as online nursing courses and learning management systems sold by publishing companies) that require certain credentials for registration, are sold exclusively in one country or must be purchased are not within the scope of this paper. We begin with the history of OCW and guidance on the use of OCW in nursing education.

2. Open courseware

2.1. *Background: open courseware*

In 2002, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, published the first proof-of-concept open courseware site with 50 courses listed and available to students over the globe. By 2006, 50 universities in China, Japan, France, the United Kingdom and the United States were offering free courseware for non-commercial purposes [5]. The first OCW focused on courses teaching information technology. As other universities joined the OER movement, topics expanded to include materials from courses in the humanities and sciences. Over 100 courses of MIT's OCW have been translated and adapted into Simplified Chinese by China Open Resources for Education (CORE) [6]. Five leading universities in the U.S., the CORE in China and 8 global universities have formed a consortium and have published 25,081 courseware from 78 providers in 20 languages [7].

Open courseware for learning or teaching in the health sciences is becoming increasingly available. John Hopkins and Tufts Universities were among the early contributors of medically-oriented open courseware. Tufts offers courseware on nutrition and human growth and development; and the John Hopkins site has courseware on ethics, epidemiology, genetics, growth and development, and all facets of public health [8,9].

The Khan Academy, created in 2008 by Salman Khan, provides educational materials that can be used to supplement traditional classroom teaching in several disciplines including medicine and nursing. Instructional videos and practice sessions are available at any time for teachers' or students' use. Topics include anatomy, physiology, infectious disease, health systems, use of antibiotics, and preparation for the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). Most materials are available in simplified Chinese [10].

The Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT), a site sponsored by the California State University System, offers numerous materials that could complement the nursing curriculum, including a short module demonstrating breath and heart sounds [11].

Schools of Nursing are becoming more frequent contributors of open courseware. The University of Michigan School of Nursing is sharing content for courses about utilization of research, palliative care, and global health [12]. George Washington University School of Nursing has developed modules on emergency preparedness, gerontological palliative care, orientation for students for whom English is a second language, and nursing basics such as bloodborne pathogens, infection control and patient safety [13].

A group of nurses from Canada has recently added a unique contribution to OCW. They are constructing a site providing OCW to support novice nurse educators in low-income countries. The site emphasizes nursing for chronic disease care and basic nursing skills [14].

2.2. *Locating open courseware for nursing education*

To locate OCW you can do a general search using OCW and the topic of interest, or you can search at an aggregate site. For example, placing the term “genetics” and “OCW” in your browser results in a list of sites for OCW about genetics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Tufts University and the University of Massachusetts at Boston. Or you can locate OCW on the Open Education Consortium Site which lists OCW from global universities and supports language-specific searching [7]. Although the content varies with each course, you will find full and partial courses (syllabi, outlines, lectures

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