

**Online Learning and Open Educational Resources:
Challenge of the Future (with a glimpse at the past)**
Rory McGreal, UNESCO/COL/ICDE Chair in OER
Athabasca University

Higher education institutions worldwide continue to face significant challenges related to providing increased access to high quality education, while containing or reducing costs. New developments in higher education all speak to the efforts on the part of the traditional higher education community, as well as more flexible providers such as open universities, to address these challenges. Such developments have the potential to increase access and flexibility in higher education. Basic education for all continues to be a goal that challenges – and will continue to challenge – many countries.

Open Educational Resources (OER) constitute an important resource with the potential to facilitate the expansion of quality education and learning opportunities worldwide. OER refers to full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials or techniques used to support access to knowledge. The free and open sharing of educational resources can serve to promote the building of knowledge societies and the reduction of the knowledge divide that separates nations, as well as the divide within societies themselves.

The relevance of OER is augmented by the exponential growth in online accessibility afforded by the wide range of new applications and devices. Moreover, this is happening at an increasingly rapid pace. Security, privacy and consistency coupled with user control. The growing trend toward online learning using the power of networks has opened the door for learners and teachers to access the world's knowledge from almost anywhere, at anytime. The internet houses the world's treasure of knowledge. It is the world's intellectual commons that renders knowledge accessible to all. The world's knowledge is a public good that should be made available to everyone.