CONCLUSION

Open textbook authors face many challenges and the need to make compromises in terms of balancing their open textbook development ambitions with the everyday demands of their academic careers. In some cases, their plans have to be scaled down; in other cases they have to be abandoned.

The journeys presented here highlight the complexities of conceptualising and creating open textbooks and the challenges authors face. Despite the highs and lows of the process, the heroic efforts of the academics undertaking this work with limited funding or other forms of institutional support is testament to their desire to improve the learning experience for their students.

DOT4D research (Cox, Masuku & Willmers, 2020) demonstrates that open textbooks have the potential to address social (in)justice in South African higher education, especially with regards to the high costs of textbooks for students, the need for curriculum transformation and the inclusion of student voices in their own learning.

DOT4D implementation activity suggests that demand is growing for open textbook development support as academics change the way they teach online; and that localisation is key to addressing curriculum transformation. This potential can however only be realised if there is broader institutional and inter-institutional support for open textbook production and use.

DOT4D advocacy efforts include engaging higher education stakeholders in a national-level 'Open Textbooks in South African Higher Education' forum. It aims to provide a platform for facilitating inter-institutional collaboration and the development of a national open textbook community of practice. The project's recently published Call to Action 2021 (DOT4D, 2021) highlights the need for broader coordination of open textbook creation and use in order to address curriculum transformation, the undergraduate performance gap and COVID-19 learning losses.

References

Cox, G., Masuku, B. & Willmers, M. (2020). Open Textbooks and Social Justice: Open Educational Practices to Address Economic, Cultural and Political Injustice at the University of Cape Town. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2020(1), 2. DOI: http://doi.org/10.5334/jime.556

DOT4D (Digital Open Textbooks for Development). (2021). *Call to Action 2021: Open Textbooks in South African Higher Education*. Cape Town: Digital Open Textbooks for Development.

Recommendations

For institutional leaders

→ Maximise efficiencies and address sustainability across the South African higher education sector. Synergies and efficiencies can be gained by addressing open textbook production by collaborating across higher education institutions.

→ Initiate pilot programmes for the support of open textbook development at your institution. This would entail setting aside modest amounts of money to support academics who require assistance in textbook writing and publishing. Establish an Open Textbook Award to provide institutional recognition for open textbook development and ideals.

→ Seek inter-institutional collaborators so that you can share the burden of this work. Different institutions are at different levels of readiness with regards to open textbook support, so it is worthwhile to partner with those who can assist in this activity.

For academics

Draw on these narratives to get a sense of the processes involved and lessons learned … as well as the gains experienced. It is our hope that the insights shared here can shed light on your own processes, and help you not to fall prey to similar setbacks.

For students

Start considering yourself as a co-creator of your knowledge and seize opportunities to get involved with the production of open textbooks and other open educational resources.