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Open Education in British Columbia

by Caroline Winter | 31 July 2019 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



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This observation was written by Caroline Winter.

At a glance:

Title	“More open textbooks arriving on student bookshelves”
Creator	The Government of British Columbia
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On April 17, 2019, the Government of British Columbia [announced a \\$3.26 million investment](#) in Open Educational Resources (OER) through [BCcampus](#). The funding was announced at the [Cascadia Open Education Summit](#) held at Simon Fraser University’s Harbour Centre Campus. BCcampus is a provincially

funded agency with a mandate to “provide teaching, learning, educational technology, and open education support to the post-secondary institutions of British Columbia” (“Our Mandate” n.d.).

Open Education Research in BC

In the recent BCcampus survey “[The Range of BC Research on Open](#),” Tannis Morgan notes that BC researchers are leading the way in open education in particular. She highlights, for example, Rajiv Jhangiani’s work at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU), especially on how open textbooks are perceived by faculty and students, their adoption patterns, and their effect on learning (2019). Research at the University of British Columbia investigates how Open Education Resources (OER) are being used and what barriers are preventing wider adoption (Morgan 2019).

Morgan also highlights [Open Journal Systems](#) (OJS), the open-source software application for publishing and managing journals developed by INKE Partnership members at the [Public Knowledge Project](#) (PKP). Noting that OJS has been a “cornerstone of the open access world” since the 1990s, Morgan cites [the project’s 2018 report](#) and calls for further research about how open technologies such as OJS, WordPress, and Pressbooks enable open education (2019).

The INKE Partnership and Open Education

Other INKE Partnership members also support Open Education. Simon Fraser University Library, for example, offers a OER Guide providing information about SFU’s [OER Grants](#) program, [OER guide](#), [Faculty OER Toolkit](#) published by BCcampus. In May 2019, SFU’s Open Education Working Group hosted [Open Education 2019: Transforming Teaching and Learning at SFU](#), a one-day event featuring a keynote talk by Juan Pablo Alperin of PKP.

[The Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur les humanités numériques \(CRIHN\)](#) hosted [OpenCon Satellite Montréal](#) in October 2018, a satellite of [SPARC’s OpenCon](#) with a session focused on Open Educational Resources. Also in 2018, the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) founded an [Open Education Working Group \(OEWG\)](#) to guide CARL’s Advancing Research Committee and open education initiatives.

Stephen Ross and Matt Huculak, INKE Partnership members from the University of Victoria, have developed an OER called the [Open Modernisms Anthology Builder](#), available through BCcampus’s Open Textbook Project. A new course at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI) 2020 taught by Olin Bjork, Stephanie Boulogne, and Inba Kehoe called [eTextbook Publishing and Open Educational Resources on the Web and Mobile Devices](#) will support other members of the INKE and DHSI communities interested in learning and developing OER.

Impact of the Provincial Funding

The funding from the BC Government will support development of OER and the support and infrastructure to encourage its adoption through the Open Textbooks Project, Zed Cred, and other initiatives, including the development of an open homework management system.

Since its launch in 2012, the [BC Open Textbooks Project](#) has developed more than 250 textbooks that are openly available for use, reuse, and customization (“Open Textbooks” n.d.). Open textbooks make post-secondary education more affordable for students and enable instructors to “remix” textbooks to suit their needs (“Open Textbooks” n.d.).

Zed Cred programs offer credentials with zero associated textbook costs. The programs began in 2017 with three programs at BC Institutions: [Kwantlen Polytechnic University](#), Thompson Rivers University, and the [Justice Institute of British Columbia](#) (“Z for Zero” n.d.). KPU has since launched two more Zed Cred programs, the [latest](#) during [Open Education Week 2019](#) (“KPU Launches” 2019).

Coverage of the BC Government’s funding announcement in the local press, including the [Fraser Valley](#)

News, the *Sooke Pocket News*, and *Victoria Buzz*, focuses on the benefits of reducing costs for post-secondary students, especially those in trades. The announcement has received little coverage in the broader academic community, and all from student organizations. The BC Federation of Students (BCFS) released a response “applauding” the funding, noting that textbook prices rose 82% between 2002 and 2012, and that to date, OERs available through the Open Textbook Project have saved students about \$9 million (“Students Applaud” 2019). The *Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC* and the UBC student newspaper *The Ubyyssey* also released statements in support of the funding, and the announcement was mentioned in the *OER Digest*.

Although, as Morgan notes in her survey, BC is at the forefront of Open Education research, she points out that the field comprises “islands of research” that are not yet connected to each other or to the broader fields that make up the Open movement, including Open Access and Open Scholarship, and invites the research community to continue the conversation about open education in BC and the Open movement as a whole.

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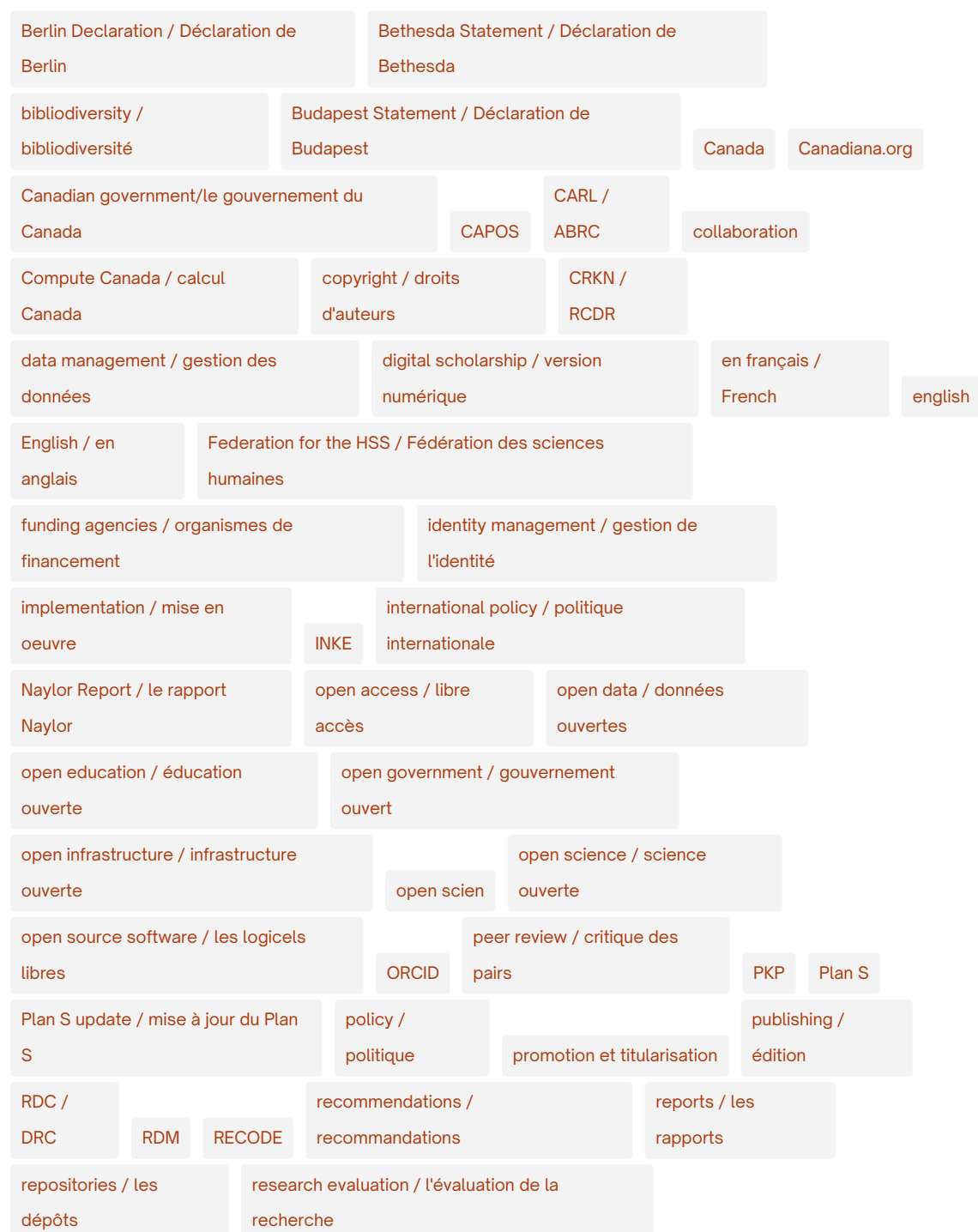
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