

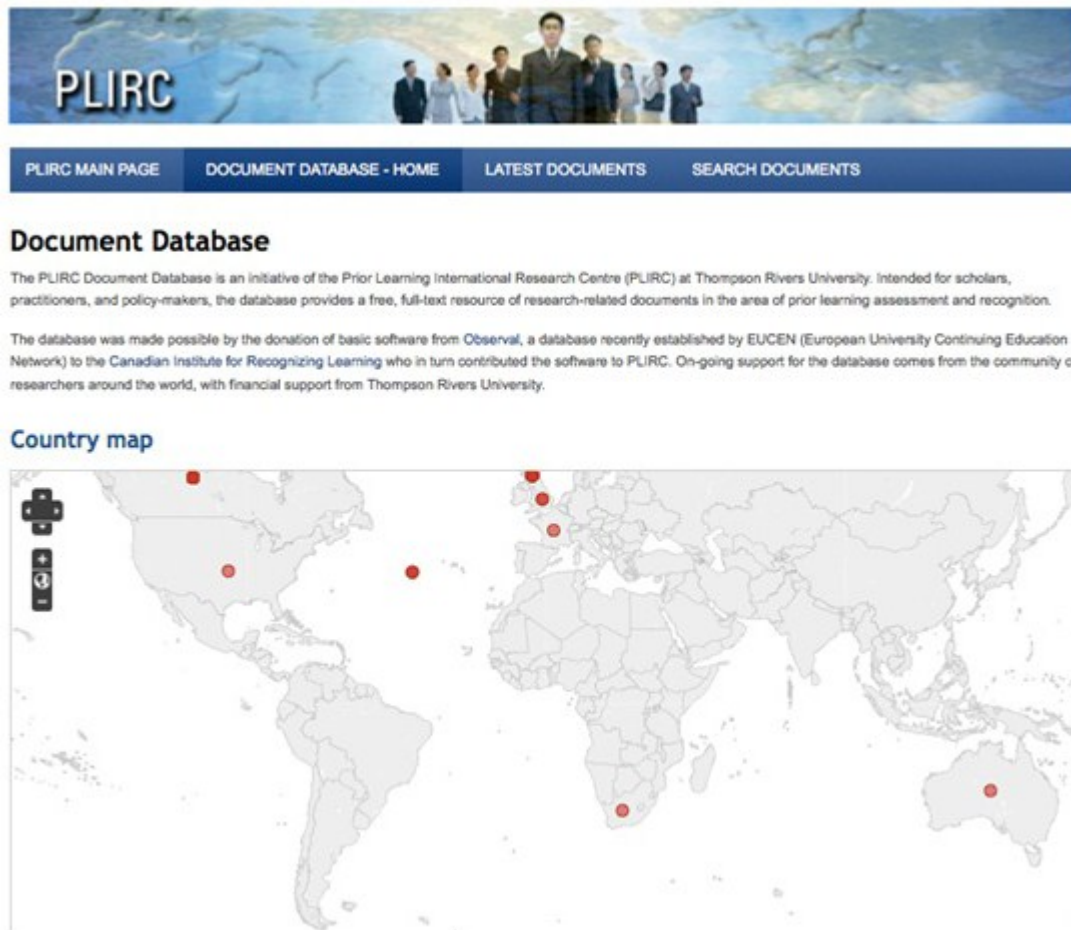
Open Educational Resources in the PLIRC Database

Christine Wihak, Thompson Rivers University, British Columbia, Canada

The PLIRC (Prior Learning International Research Centre) has created a single, PLAR-focused, full-text database to provide easy access to research and act as a link between researchers, public policymakers and practitioners. The URL for the database is ideasketch.tru.ca (Note: no http or www). The primary purpose of the PLIRC database is to provide a practical resource to support scholarship in PLAR. Using crowd sourcing to populate and maintain the database, our long-term plan is to offer both current and historical documents, with downloadable full text versions whenever copyright allows.

The database offers several convenient methods to locate documents. First, we have a clickable map if you're interested in literature from a particular country or geographic area (Figure 1). The size of the red dot is in proportion to the number of relevant documents.

Figure 1. Clickable map, PLIRC database



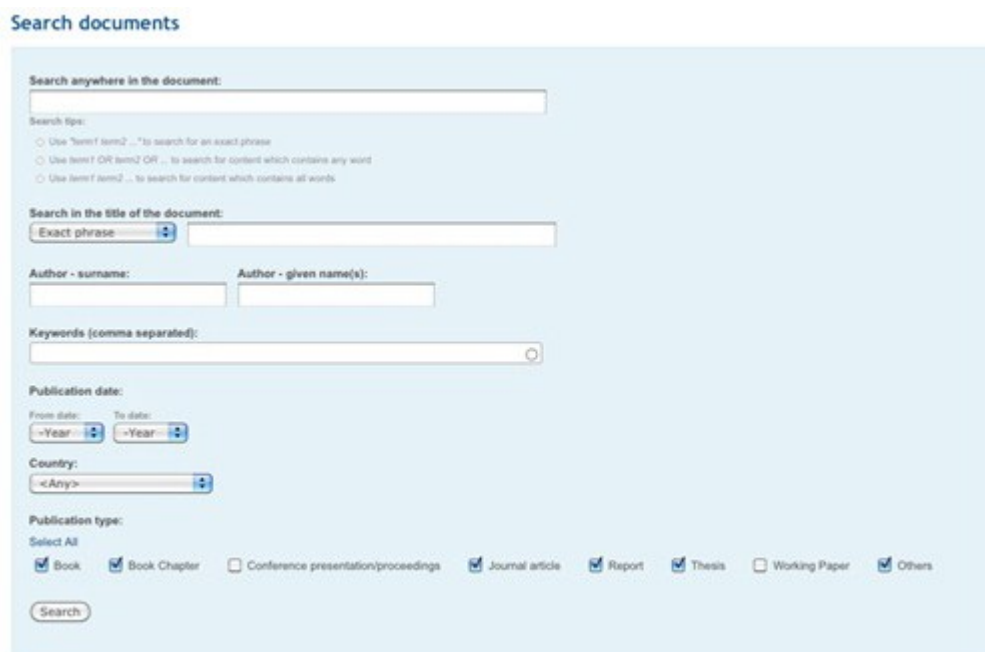
Second, we offer the **Latest documents** feature (Figure 2), a clickable display of the documents recently added to the database. This feature is very convenient for both new and frequent users. When we have permission to include a downloadable PDF file of the document, the display shows the actual cover of the document. If we do not have permission to use the full text attachment, the display shows a placeholder with bibliographic information.

Figure 2. Latest documents, PLIRC database



Finally, we offer a more conventional search tool (Figure 3). Because the database only contains PLAR-related documents, search terms do not need to include the alphabet soup of acronyms for PLAR around the world. For example, you could just enter the term “open education,” and you would find two documents on this topic specifically related to PLAR: *Flexible Paths to Assessment for OER Learners* (Conrad & McGreal, 2012) and *Open Learning Recognition: Taking Open Educational Resources a Step Further* (Camilleri et al., 2012). These two documents bring us to the final feature of the PLIRC database.

Figure 3. Search tool, PLIRC database



In each issue of *PLAIO*, we intend to offer a column called “PLIRC Research Database.” This column will highlight a document or documents from the database that relate to the theme of the issue. These documents may be newly published, or they may be historical pieces that remain of significance. Or they may be pieces from the “gray literature” that have not previously been peer-reviewed. Authored in rotation by different members of the PLIRC board, the column will contextualize the document within the literature, and will discuss why the selected pieces are significant.

The theme of this issue of *PLAIO* is the relationship between the recognition of prior learning and the rapidly developing fields of open educational resources such as MOOCs (massive open online courses). The two documents we have chosen to highlight are important because relatively little has been written to date on this relationship. These two pieces, essentially pragmatic, atheoretical reports, are nevertheless frontrunners in what is becoming an emerging area of research in the PLAR field.

The Conrad and McGreal (2012) article was published in a journal designed to appeal to people with an interest in distance education, and hence could easily be overlooked by those of us primarily focused on PLAR. Briefly, the article reported on an international survey of PLAR policies in postsecondary institutions known for their reputations in this area. The research revealed a wide diversity of institutional practices, indicating that the use of PLAR to accredit learning from OERs is likely to follow many different routes.

Camilleri et al. (2012) is the final report of a two-year research project conducted by eight European partners on how learning from OERs could be accredited within the conventions of the European Transfer Credit System. The report provided a detailed discussion of the issues involved. Chapter 3 of the report offered a very useful overview and summary of different scenarios that could be used to accredit this learning, while Chapter 5 discussed a feasibility study conducted at five higher education institutions in Europe.

References

- Conrad, D., & McGreal, R. (2012, October). Flexible paths to assessment for OER learners. *Journal of Interactive Media Education: Cambridge OER 2012 Special Issue*. Retrieved from <http://www-jime.open.ac.uk/article/2012-12/pdf>
- Camilleri, A. F., Ferrari, L., Haywood, J., Maina, M., Pérez-Mateo, M., Montes, R., Nouria, C., Sangrà, A., Tannhäuser, A.-C. (2012). *Open learning recognition: Taking open educational resources a step further*. Belgium: EFQUEL – European Foundation for Quality in e-Learning. Retrieved from <http://ideasketch.tru.ca/documents/open-learning-recognition-taking-open-educational-resources-step-further>