Academic Spring

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You may have come across discussion of the 'academic spring' – the movement started by academics (fairly randomly initially) to regain control of the journals that we write and edit. It has now been supported by Harvard University and even our government with the recent publication of the Finch Report (2012). You can find discussion of it in the article in *The Guardian* entitled 'Wikipedia founder to help in government's research scheme: academic spring campaign aims to make all taxpayer-funded academic research available for free online' (Jha, 2012).

There was an excellent article by George Monbiot (2011) also in *The Guardian*, summing up the issues really well – entitled 'Academic publishers make Murdoch look like a socialist.' The point he makes is that journal subscriptions now consume 65% of the budgets of libraries. He quotes independent research showing that the publisher adds little value to the publishing process. Yet the charges for the journals are exorbitant. Monbiot proceeds: 'What we see here is pure rentier capitalism: monopolising a public resource then charging exorbitant fees to use it.'

The central issue is that we academics, supported by taxpayers, write the stuff in these journals for free, we edit and peer review them for free, and then we (or rather the taxpayer again) have to *pay* to read the stuff that we write! And the fees we pay are huge: journals in our own area can cost £1500 per year for a library (yes, 1500 – we haven't added a zero by mistake), and in the sciences they can be ten times more.

Can we encourage you to visit the article in *The Guardian* that we mention above (Jha, 2012) and consider supporting the boycott outlined in the article: the link to it is at

http://thecostofknowledge.com/ . Here, 13366 researchers have signed up to boycott journals owned by Elsevier.

It is going to be hard to change the culture but we believe it can be done. One of the first things that needs to change is that the prestige of the 'top' journals needs to be taken down a peg or two as we switch our allegiance to Open Access (OA) journals. So we should write for them; and we should write our best articles for them. In fact, the Wellcome Trust has recently announced plans actually to withhold funding unless researchers agree to make findings freely available in OA journals (Wellcome Trust, 2013). Likewise, Harvard University has encouraged its academics to publish in OA journals and to resign from editorial positions in publications that keep articles behind paywalls.

One such OA journal that we education researchers could start off with is the one run by colleagues at Durham: the *Online Educational Research Journal* (OERJ). Go to www.oerj.org and click the 'About' link at the top left. OERJ is designed to be run by academics for academics whilst taking advantage of some of the ideas used in other web-based ventures such as YouTube. The basic plan is this: researchers submit their article and after quick checks for its suitability the article is published anonymously online. In submitting the article the author(s) agree to review three papers for OERJ. As part of the review, ratings are given to the article and they appear online together with comments; the author(s) can respond online. Once three reviews are complete authors are informed and their names are revealed – it becomes onymous – unless authors decide to withdraw.

Anyone can access any article, can comment on it and can rate it. It is also possible to discuss articles in a blog-type fashion. Since the launch two years ago, 35 articles have been published, four have been downloaded more than 1000 times and there has been a steady recent growth in the numbers of articles being submitted. The original article (Tymms et al 2010) explains the driving ideas behind the journal.

Now that top American universities and even governments are onside, the movement could be

unstoppable. It just needs *us* as academics now to change our behaviour.

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