Editorial - Cambridge OER 2012 Special Edition

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This second JIME special edition on Open Educational Resources draws on the success of the recent Cambridge 2012 Conference, which was jointly hosted by the OpenCourseWare Consortium (OCWC) and the Support Centre for Open Resources in Education (SCORE), at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. Key themes from the conference on innovation, impact and collaboration for advancing OpenCourseWare and Open Educational Resources globally are presented in the papers in this special issue.

In a useful opening paper, McAndrew, Farrow, Law and Elliot-Cirigottis put forward some key challenges for the future of OER as identified in the OER Evidence Hub, which was part of the OLnet project at the Open University, UK. The twelve challenges are grouped into four overarching categories: preparation (licensing, technology and access), common issues for learning (quality, sustainability and reuse), areas for research (cost/benefit, impact of research and policy), and emerging areas (advocacy, culture and assessment). All of these challenges are examined in a practical context provided by the Bridge to Success project, in which open introductory courses from the Open University were adapted for use in US Community Colleges.

Two broad-reaching papers, which take in global perspectives for furthering our understanding of OER initiatives internationally, feature in this special OER edition of JIME. The first by Bateman, Lane and Moon presents an emerging typology with four key categories for analysing OER initiatives according to the

creation, organisation, dissemination and utilisation of OER. Cognizant of the multifaceted nature of the international OER movement, and the diversity of stakeholder interests represented and involved in facilitating this movement, three mature OER projects - TESSA, Thutong Portal and Rip-Mix-Learn - are presented for detailed analysis across a further eighteen sub categories. These discrete categories provide inroads for exploring a number of properties and possible dimensions for successfully building on the outcomes of existing OER initiatives. This is an ambitious and thought-provoking endeavour that offers many insights into an emerging typology for analysing the world of OER.

The second of these expansive papers reflects on institutional practices and policies for recognizing prior learning (RPL) in relation to assessment and transfer protocols for credentialing OER learning. With reference to the growing momentum behind globally collaborative OER initiatives in higher education, most notably the OER University (OERu), Conrad and McGreal present a comparative study of RPL practices and policies in place at different institutions around the globe. Building on findings from a one-year study into RPL procedures, the authors identify sensitivities, both at the institutional and the individual level, surrounding the adoption of cost-effective RPL procedures. Guidance is offered to those growing OER initiatives and their interested stakeholders worldwide who are committed to the development of fair and open RPL policies, practices and transfer protocols for effectively assessing and credentialing OER learning in a time of rapid expansion.

The context for Ehiyazaryan-White's paper, which reports on the embedding of open academic practices in social science research methods teaching, is one where Higher Education is delivered in a Further Education college. This crossover area has received very little attention in the OER literature and is identified here as one that presents its own challenges. The failure to fully implement blended and distance learning pedagogies and the often poor digital literacy skills of learners are presented as barriers in this context. Through a well-designed action research study, the author presents some insights into the processes of developing open academic practice in research methods teaching for the social sciences. These include: the role of OER in supporting the introduction of blended learning; the benefits of engaging in reflective practice as part of an exploration into OER reuse; the role of the teacher in embedding and contextualizing OER; the potential of OER for promoting interdisciplinarity; and the capacity for OER to support learners with understanding difficult concepts.

Hughes and McKenna report on the experiences and attitudes of academics who are new to the concept of OER. The project presented in this paper was part of an on-going UK OER programme that encouraged staff to design and release OER. This paper is based upon discussions and reflections that were documented throughout the project and a series of 'professional conversations' in which participants, including the authors, discussed the impact of using OER in their academic practice. The authors suggest that participating in Open Educational Practice can transform attitudes and practices surrounding the sharing and dissemination of educational texts and materials. A number of interesting themes emerged from the project data. These included not all together welcome changes in 'teaching identities' whereby teaching work was relocated into the public domain and where OER came to be regarded as 'publications', which in turn led to some concerns about intellectual property rights. Participants did, however, agree that the project had made them more aware of the Open Education movement as one which espoused a broad set of values that they were willing to embrace: sharing, community participation, and benefitting the common good.

Martinez-Arboleda examines the reviewing and endorsement mechanisms

available in the Humbox project for potentially engaging graduate-recruiting employers to review and endorse employability-related OER in the Arts and Humanities. This paper considers the perceptions and expectations of academic practitioners for involving employers in a dialogue around curricular resources development for enhancing employability awareness in learners. Considerations were raised as to whether this dialogue could actually be articulated around OER that are hosted in open educational repositories like the Humbox to contribute to the sustainability and currency of the OER residing therein. In interviews carried out with academics, tensions around the relationship between higher education and industry emerged, and the usefulness and pertinence of employers' judgments on the pedagogical value of teaching and learning resources are discussed for presentation in this paper.

The final paper in this special issue addresses the potential for OER to help revitalise the teaching of quantitative research methods in the social sciences. It concerns the intersection of three distinct activities - sharing practice through OER, teaching Quantitative Research Methods at the undergraduate level, and focusing on real world data for engaging students in the exploration of pressing global problems. Despite the high demand for quantitative research skills among employers, Carter points out that there are relatively few students who gain expertise in these crucial methods through conventional quantitative research methods teaching. In an OER parallel universe, case studies for the successful use of real world data in teaching are presented; in which students learn quantitative techniques whilst developing key transferable skills for working with data. Carter argues that OER can be a good vehicle for building in the use of real world data into research methods courses, thereby strengthening quantitative research methods teaching. However, although the sharing of resources is evident, this tends to be within funded projects where resource sharing is a requirement. Open academic practice has yet to become mainstream practice. The paper concludes that more needs to be done to understand how sharing can be encouraged and identifies a need for there to be more digital stewards or champions to act as exemplars of good practice in communities that are new to sharing openly.