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Introduction to JIME Special Edition on Open Educational Resources (OER)

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This Open Educational Resources (OER) special edition of JIME offers a range of articles on openness, reflecting projects, theories, practices and practitioners from diverse and rapidly changing educational contexts.

Central to two of the articles in this special edition is the area of open practice. A discussion on the openness-creativity cycle is offered by Weller through a refined lens on changing perceptions of open as they apply to new models of educational practice. He discusses the link between new technologies and open education, identifying this connection as an enabler of creativity among a new breed of digital scholar. An exploration of the mechanisms by which new technologies have facilitated openness, along with why this is seen to be a desirable and an effective mode of operation in digitally networked environments are discussed. Particular reference to the ways in which practitioners are engaging with little versus big OER (Hoyle, 2009) is highlighted in this paper for consideration.

Wolfenden, Buckler and Keraro from the Teacher Education in Sub Saharan Africa (TESSA) project present case studies around the implementation of a highly structured template for reusing and re-contextualising existing open educational resources across learning and teaching contexts in the target region. By locating individual teaching practitioners at the centre of this OER design and development process, useful insights have been surfaced from focus groups

about different enablers as well as barriers for successfully embedding OER developed all around the world within localised educational systems and cultures. Guidance is also offered for the development of self-sustaining communities of practice who are drawing on existing OER for adaptation and (re)use in often vastly different educational contexts than those that the OER were originally designed for.

Two of the articles more prominently draw on established theoretical approaches, grounded in the psychology and education disciplines, in order to promote a better understanding of issues of reuse and motivation for reuse with OER.

Pegler explores the motivations for reuse of practitioners who are actively engaged in reuse as teaching and learning practice. The paper draws on longitudinal data and case studies to present an analysis of the factors and issues which influence strategies for reuse. In this work Pegler looks beyond the technical barriers and enablers of reuse and seeks a deeper understanding of the motivating influences on practitioners where reuse is concerned. The findings of the empirical research propose a move towards developing a theoretical basis for understanding reuse, relating this to Herzberg's two factor theory of motivation. A reusable output in the form of a card sort game is included, providing a physical mechanism for discussing motivational factors in OER reuse.

The contribution of OER to research methods teaching is explored by Brent, Gibbs and Gruszczynska. The authors foreground social science research methods as an area which offers a wealth of opportunities for the development of OER. The benefits of OER for addressing some of the difficulties in teaching and learning research methods across different levels of study and within different subject contexts are explored. Drawing on Lave and Wenger's principles of communities of practice, the authors make a case for the need to make fuller use of social media to develop such communities of practice as an essential support mechanism in the successful reuse of OER within a research methods context.