

Article

Responding to the Coronavirus with Open Educational Resources

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Abstract

Open Educational Resources (OER) are characterised by being available in the public domain under an open license, typically Creative Commons, so they can be copied, redistributed and reworked. The literature shows OER to be under-recognised in TESOL but the argument in this discussion paper is that the coronavirus provides an opportunity for OER to be integrated into the university curriculum. This is not simply because OER are free of cost, although this is not an insignificant advantage in an industry often under severe financial constraints, especially in a period of severe disruption as witnessed with the coronavirus. Of more significance are claims that the adoption of OER can enhance pedagogy. Three case studies are used to demonstrate the value of OER in coronavirus-affected university settings. The first is a personal scenario while the second and third are putative constructions of OER use. My own case study is of using OER to create an observation procedure to support instructors transitioning to online teaching. In the second study, OER are used to teach faculty how to write grant proposals. In the third, OER are a source for student oral presentations. This leads to reflection on the claims made for OER as regards pedagogy and the challenges they face. The conclusion is that the impact of OER remains potential until the research base is fuller but at the very least the coronavirus represents a testing ground for raising awareness of and experimenting with OER.

Keywords

The coronavirus, open education resources

1 Introduction

The purpose of this discussion article is to describe the potential of Open Educational Resources (OER) to impact TESOL in a university setting during and beyond the coronavirus pandemic. By way of two case-studies, OER are presented as a practical means of helping university instructors' transition from face-to-face to online teaching while maintaining the quality of the learning experience. The term OER dates back to a UNESCO Forum on open courseware at the beginning of the millennium and a full definition is taken from that body's recent (2020) proclamation.

Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning and research materials in any

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medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. (UNESCO)

Two aspects of the definition are critical: *public domain* and *open license*. While it is possible for OER to be purely physical with no digital counterpart (that battered book in a community library which can be borrowed by anyone), in reality public domain means the Internet. An open license as a minimum allows the work to be accessed, stored and shared in its original version as long as the original author is attributed. [Creative Commons](#), a community project providing standardised licenses that allow authors freedom over copyright restrictions, have become the gold standard for organisations such as the Open University UK where OER are an important part of their educational mission (Hales & Lane, n.d.).

What are OER? Rimmer (2020) lists images, videos, worksheets, multimedia presentations, textbooks, tests, journals and whole courses. In other words, as noted by Thoms et al. (2018), a rare study of OER in a TESOL context, the term OER refers to any resource related to teaching and learning which is accessible to the public and licensed. The public criterion is much easier to satisfy than the licensing requirement; it is likely that much of the content teachers download for classes, such as educational YouTube videos, is infringement of copyright. In fact, a significant barrier to the adoption of OER is the simple fact that users do not know how to recognise them as such: a recent study (Baas et al., 2019) in the Netherlands found that while 42% of university lecturers had heard of OER only 14% were aware of Creative Commons. This is despite the availability of large established OER repositories such as [MERLOT](#) and [OpenStax](#).

In university education, OER have attracted most attention as an antidote to the spiralling cost of textbooks for students (see Pitt et al., 2019). However, the advantages of using OER go well beyond the fact that they are free, although this is not a minor consideration given the financial repercussions of the coronavirus on education and the inevitable pressure to reduce expenditure. In a wide survey of the OER community, McGill et al. (2013) found that the three most appreciated benefits of OER were (in order of preference): increased access for learners, meaning that students could use a wider variety of resources; enhanced pedagogy, as educators became more innovative; the sharing of resources across disciplines, with educators using OER originating from a separate curriculum area. Learners are encouraged to become not just consumers of OER but producers as they become involved in selecting and repurposing OER. The bold claim by McGill et al. (2013) is that collaboration on this level changes the relationship between learners and institutions.

On a less sanguine note, as indicated with reference to Thoms et al. (2018), OER have attracted little interest in TESOL. Case studies of OER have mainly been located in higher-education but in disciplines other than TESOL. This is exemplified by Cronin's (2017) investigation into OER use in a university in Ireland, which included disciplines within STEM, arts, social science, business and law. This article addresses a gap in the literature by proposing concrete applications of OER which are indicative of their potential in TESOL classes at university level. Furthermore, it is suggested that the coronavirus crisis represents a particular opportunity for adopting OER because in the abrupt switch to online teaching there is a greater dependence on digital elements and increased flexibility in their mode of delivery. The next section provides a fuller picture of OER, including the practicalities of accessing OER in TESOL. This is followed by three case studies of how OER could be integrated into the curriculum in response to the coronavirus. In light of the lack of data from TESOL, the first is a personal case study that represents a snapshot of my own use of OER. The second and third case studies are not based on experience but are putative representations of how OER may function in other higher education environments. The final section reflects on the impact of such OER-led interventions in a coronavirus-affected landscape.

2 OER and TESOL

OER were first articulated (Downes, 2001) as *learning objects* or reusable course components, for example texts or videos, which could be shared and combined in different permutations to create content for new learning programmes. The chief value of learning objects lay in replicating courses and removing the inefficiencies of designing from scratch. This seemed both practical and realistic at the start of the millenium when universal computer ownership and Internet access became more than aspirational. Epistemologically, learning objects complemented a cognitivist view of learning as heavily structured and the brain as a computer, with the main task consisting of storing and processing information (see Croft & Cruse, 2004).

However, learning objects just never caught on. The approach was technically difficult to implement because it was necessary to write computer algorithms to design new courses, involving a knowledge of coding outside the scope of most educators (Lamb, 2009). Parrish (2004) also points to the fact that the *objects* in learning objects was too suggestive of an automatised approach to education where learning consists of feeding bits (in a computer sense) of knowledge to passive consumers. The principle of pooling and sharing knowledge was well motivated, and the online mechanism which allowed this could not be ignored, but learning objects gave more weight to principles of design than actual learning.

OER accentuated the sharing aspect of learning objects and highlighted the role of users, both educators and learners, in dissemination. The focus switched from accessibility, what could be shared, to usability, how it could be shared. An influential framework for this process is Wiley's 5Rs (Wiley, 2014) of Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix and Redistribute (see table 1 below).

Table 1
Wiley's 5Rs

Retain	Accessing, downloading and storing materials.
Reuse	Transferring the materials to the new classroom context.
Revise	Adapting the materials to meet the needs of your learners.
Remix	Merging materials, for example text with audio.
Redistribute	Sharing the materials with the wider community.

The fact that the majority of users do not get beyond the Retain stage (Arinto et al., 2017) continues to frustrate. The major difference between OER and commercial resources is that fact that OER can (legally) be repurposed. The rationale for this may not be purely pedagogical. For example, subtitles could be added to a video in order to make it more inclusive for students with a hearing disorder. (Richardson's, 2013, survey of major OER repositories reveals great variation in terms of their accessibility).

Very few of these developments are reflected in TESOL. This is somewhat odd given that materials, especially textbooks (Rimmer, 2013), have always been core to discussion of methodology. My conjecture is that the hold of the international publishers is so great in our field (Harwood, 2005, does not seem dated in this conclusion in an EAP context) that non-commercial resources seem inferior. Perryman & Lesperance (2015) comment from a non-TESOL context but their observation that there is too little awareness of OER amongst practitioners holds true in our field.

Marcotte (2020) recommends six OER repositories for TESOL. One of them I was not able to access despite using multiple devices and browsers. The five I could check are presented in Table 2 with my commentary.

Table 2
Five OER Repositories

Repository	Content summary	Commentary
OER Commons	60,000 educational resources covering pre-school to college and professional spheres.	Very comprehensive and professional site. Includes hubs for collaboration between users.
Open Textbook Library	Over 700 textbooks for use in higher education.	One specific EAP textbook found but other titles could be relevant.
MERLOT	40,000 materials submitted by members of the MERLOT community.	Rigorous vetting of material and awards for excellent contributions.
Teaching Commons	Resources created by and (mostly) focused on higher education institutes.	A wide range of college-level textbooks.
HippoCampus	The name notwithstanding, content does cover university level.	Particularly useful for non-text based materials such as video and animation.

OER Commons, MERLOT and HippoCampus require registration but this is free regardless of whether you are an educator or member of the public. This contrasts with responses to the coronavirus which are restricted to users with a verifiable profile; an example being the (laudable) initiative by the distributor RedShelf to supply free textbooks to teachers in the USA for a fixed term.

To illustrate the process of accessing the repositories, a screenshot of MERLOT is shown with a search for *ESL materials* filtered by college-level audience (see figure 1 below).

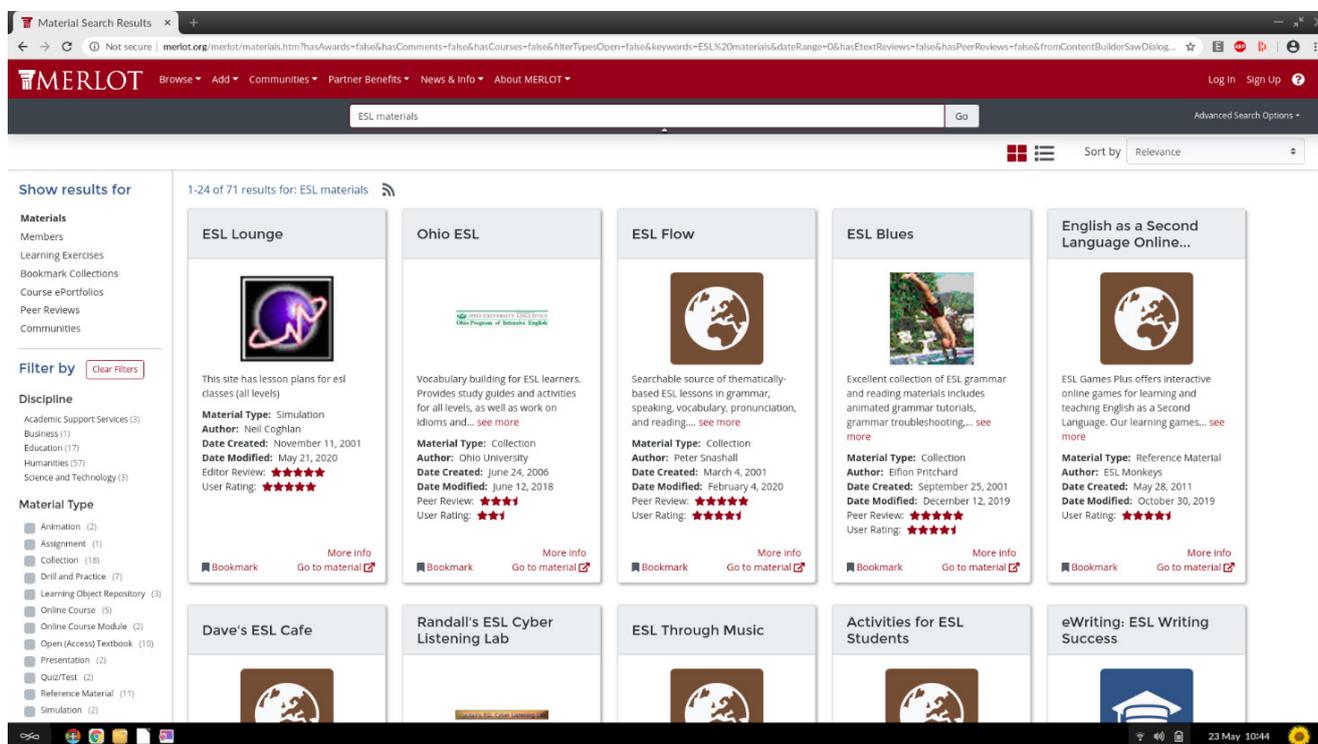


Figure 1. Screenshot of MERLOT

All the results are substantial collections themselves and would need sifting for relevance and suitability. The peer review and user ratings are useful to gauge whether a collection is worth

investigating but you still need to invest time in seeing what is there. None of these five repositories are dedicated to TESOL but some useful academic resources are hidden in other subject areas. To illustrate from HippoCampus, a search under Earth Science resources finds a short [video](#) on under-ocean volcanoes. The video is authentic but accessible to a non-specialist audience so it is eminently suitable as listening practice for advanced students. Generally, you need to learn how to navigate each repository and maximise the features. OER Commons, MERLOT and Teaching Commons allow experienced users to contribute resources, which is very much in the spirit of OER.

It is challenging to find reviews of OER other than vetted comments on OER sites. As an unorthodox way of addressing this, I took advantage of my access to a closed FutureLearn course on open learning. One activity required participants to comment on OER repositories. As a student on this course myself, I could view comments made on public blogs. A selection shows that responses mirrored issues in the theoretical literature. For example, Perez (2020) finds it too time-consuming to access and repurpose OER. While Andrewes (2020) is impressed by the selection on MERLOT, she also feels too much time investment would be needed to tailor the OER to her needs. Robinson (2020) similarly singles out MERLOT for praise but he is conscious that OER need tight quality controls. Baxter (2020) manages to create a whole course using OER from different depositories but finds the overall product uneven because the OER have all come from different contexts. In short, this is a mixed reception from commentators who, by virtue of doing a course on open learning, are more informed than most teachers of OER.

3 Applications of OER

A case study approach is adopted in order to demonstrate a variety of scenarios in which OER are partial solutions to coronavirus-affected TESOL instruction in university settings. Case studies can be designed and used for different purposes but the central feature is that they offer an inside perspective on a phenomenon (Woodside, 2010). This approach is conducive to understanding how the main protagonists in these scenarios, educators and learners, experience the introduction of OER. Furthermore, implementing OER is a process consisting of several steps so, as Gillham (2010) notes, case studies are particularly relevant to describing how the interventions unfold and what this entails for those impacted.

There are three case studies. The first pertains to my own efforts to incorporate OER within a UK university offering a pre-sessional TESOL course. In the second, OER are used to teach faculty in a Russian university how to write grant proposals. The third is set in China, where OER are a source for student oral presentations. The first case study is an actual lived experience. The other two case studies differ in that they do not involve existing universities with actual instructors and learners. This is for the simple reason that at the time of writing it is too challenging to collect data when the majority of campuses are in lock-down with staff and systems under extreme pressure to accommodate. Remote methods of data collection such as online surveys and telephone interviews presume the availability of staff and their capacity to divert time away from essential tasks. Unfortunately, at this stage of the pandemic, research is likely to be a distraction from the more urgent responsibility of maintaining instruction in a safe environment. While these two case studies may not be authentic in terms of reality, they are valid instruments of retrospection on OER.

Care is taken to supply sufficient background to the three cases to contextualise the application of OER. Context, defined here as the role of OER in a specific curriculum, is noted to be of particular importance to OER, to the extent that Bates (2019) deems OER to be useless if they are treated as contextless. No context can ever be fully delineated and the global nature of TESOL makes it difficult to establish contexts which have universal resonance. However, the claim is not that these OER are replicable outside their immediate context. The aim is descriptive, to suggest the potential of OER if related to specific circumstances.

3.1 Case study 1

UK universities traditionally gain a good proportion of international students through pre-sessional EAP courses which are a prerequisite of acceptance onto degree programmes. These courses typically last between four and ten weeks and are taught on campus. The programmes are specific to each university but they generally cover the four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing in an EAP context and they may have separate strands related to content areas, for example, business and finance. The coronavirus has forced all these courses online and at very short notice language centres, such as Manchester University Language Centre where I teach, have had to convert face-to-face to remote provision.

Much of our energy has naturally been focused on programme design and practical issues with digitalising print content. However, my interest has been in the support provided to instructors to teach online. For UK university language centres, summer has a different dynamic in that a large number of temporary staff are hired to teach pre-sessional courses. They are mostly experienced EAP teachers and the majority are returners from previous years. Nevertheless, it is likely that online teaching is a new or very recent (from the start of the coronavirus) skill for many of them. Hence, teachers were informed that the course would be online and advised to withdraw if they felt outside their comfort zone. The fact that few have withdrawn at this stage does not mean teachers' self-evaluations are reliable. The interview process for new teachers was tweaked to identify teachers' familiarity with online provision but it is difficult to gauge this competence with returners. In short, summer 2020 will see a sizeable group of instructors teaching online in a high-stakes environment for the first time.

The language centre has relied on three support mechanisms: (i) a three-day induction period prior to teaching; (ii) a programme of developmental workshops; (iii) lesson observation. I think that being observed by permanent faculty members would be the most effective way of supporting teachers in their transition to online teaching. My faith in observation stems from my experience of previous summers and backed up by a considerable literature linking observation to development (e.g., Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, 2017; Salazar, 2018; Scourfield, 2019). For example, Hendry & Oliver (2012) report that eight out of nine teachers learned new strategies through both observing and being observed by peers. The problem is that our existing tried-and-tested observation procedure is based on visiting physical classrooms. The literature on online observation is limited (see Bennet & Barp, 2008; Jones & Gallen, 2016; Nicolson & Harper, 2014) but studies such as Walker (2015) make it clear that the exercise needs to be applied according to different criteria. Most obviously, instructors' faculty with the digital tools is a basic factor in management of the learning process. Subtler criteria include the challenge of developing rapport with remote students and supporting learners uncomfortable with technology (White & Le Cornu, 2011, debunked the myth that all young people are digitally adept).

To date our language centre's observation documentation consists of a checklist drawing on EAP teaching competencies derived from the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) framework (Alexander et al., 2008). Naturally, this framework is modelled on face-to-face delivery. Statements such as "[the ability to} integrate IT into delivery, to enhance IT skills and reflect academic practices" (Alexander et al., 2008, p. 8) illustrate that the digital is envisaged as supplementary rather than central to the curriculum. Reference to this document does not render our observation checklist invalid as much of the criteria still pertain, for example language awareness. However, the observation tool needs to reflect the new reality.

Through the BALEAP (2020a) discussion list, I was given access to a very detailed guide to peer observation for distance tutors. I am including this guide in the category of OER because it is provided free in a public forum and the author has given explicit permission, encouragement even, for users to distribute and repurpose. However, as an unpublished word document, sharing is limited to personal

contacts and it lacks a license. It is suggestive of a cline of OER, with some resources being more open than others.

The guide itself consists of a questionnaire, guidance notes and an appendix of observation criteria. The questionnaire elicits the background and purpose of the observation from the viewpoint of the observer and observed. The guidance notes highlight the issues involved in peer observation and how these can be manipulated to best advantage. The observation criteria include example of technology use, for example, emoticons to inject humour, as part of establishing a rapport with students you may never physically meet.

This is not a document that can be used (without modification) as a developmental tool in my university. First, it focuses on peer observation. We will not be able to arrange peer observation in summer as tutors teach at the same times. Instead, observations with the same developmental aim will be carried out by permanent staff, who are well experienced and qualified. Second, the observation criteria are generalised and would need tailoring to our course. For example, ideally descriptors would reference affordances of the Virtual Learning Environment, Blackboard Collaborate, we are using in summer as this is instrumental to delivering the content.

However, the guide represents a strong starting point for reconceptualising our observation system. I then searched Teaching Commons for material on online learning to inform the development of the observation tool. I found a methodology textbook *Best Practices in Online Teaching* (Cain, 2011), which I am currently referring to in conjunction with the guide to develop the criteria. At the time of writing, I am refining descriptors which represent the competencies displayed in teaching online during our pre-sessional context. My next step will be to consult colleagues and then trial the observation instrument with a small group of teachers. My ultimate intention is to revise the tool in light of the summer experience and then publish it under a Creative Commons licence.

3.2 Case study 2

In the semester before the coronavirus outbreak, a provincial state university in Russia started an academic English programme to support faculty. The majority of faculty have doctorates in their discipline and extensive research and teaching experience. However, the demography of the faculty is ageing since the economic situation in Russia discourages younger academics from working at university. This means that for most of the current faculty, their previous formal experience of learning English was during the Soviet Union where the closed system did not embrace a communicative methodology and opportunities for language exchange were limited. Against this background, the academic English programme has proven a success and the content is driven by the needs of faculty to communicate with an English-speaking audience.

The university is particularly keen for faculty to attract funding from international bodies as this raises the institution's profile and brings revenue. To achieve this, a strand of the English programme was designed to support staff applying for funding, from researching and writing a grant proposal to giving an oral presentation of their project. A modest budget had been set aside to procure EAP textbooks covering this topic and a tentative relationship had been established with a university in the USA which offered to provide feedback on written grant proposals in terms of content and language. The coronavirus disrupted this plan. First, face-to-face English classes became impossible; second, the budget for new books was withdrawn; third, the US partner had to postpone their assistance indefinitely to deal with their own coronavirus crisis.

One TESOL instructor from Russia, Maria, is aware of OER and convinces colleagues that they could be utilised in an online format to keep the programme alive. Management were initially sceptical. While they appreciated the fact OER were free, they voiced the common concern that this probably meant the material was poor quality (cf. Angell et al, 2011). However, Maria pointed out

that this represented a low-risk way of investigating OER use on a wider scale in the university and thus foreshadow the benefits to the institution detailed in McGill et al. (2013), for example increased recognition.

Maria is familiar with [OER Commons](#) and uses the search criteria to locate a worksheet resource giving guidance on [grant proposals](#). The terms of the Creative Commons license allow the university to copy and redistribute the material for non-commercial purposes. It does not permit the content to be changed in any way prior to distribution. The worksheet consists of the following: a list of questions applicants should ask themselves in the planning process, for example, *How will you measure and report on the success of your project?*; guidelines on writing a report, for example, the BLOC (Brief, Logical, Organised, Clear) injunction; case studies of successful applications; a list of funding bodies.

Maria decides to organise training on the topic beginning with a video conference. Prior to this, she emails the worksheet to faculty who signed up for the programme. In this first session, Maria presents benefits and challenges of applying for international grants on the basis of her own experience of an unsuccessful attempt to obtain funding from a teaching association two years earlier. She uses her failed application and the awarding body's feedback to give a personal perspective on the topic. Maria then groups participants loosely by discipline to go through the project planning questions in the worksheet and answer them according to a real or anticipated project. In plenary mode, representatives from each group summarise conclusions from their discussion.

The next stage is asynchronous. Following the advice on the worksheet, faculty write individual funding applications in response to the projects they have identified in the video conference. Once collected, they are redistributed amongst the group for peer review according to content and language criteria. This is essentially written feedback but some colleagues do meet virtually for oral feedback. Maria accesses all applications and comments and produces global written feedback. Some faculty then produce second drafts.

The final stage is a second video conference to judge a successful application. Maria has organised a panel of judges not involved in the first stages. They listen to instructors presenting their case for funding. Judges use the presentations in combination with the written reports to decide who to award funding to. Final feedback is given to all participants on their oral presentations. Maria concludes this OER initiative by publicly rating the worksheet on the OER Commons website and informing the wider community of how she has used it and what recommendations she would make for new versions of the resource.

3.3 Case study 3

Peter has recently been appointed as a TESOL instructor at a university in China. The university is expanding its online provision to attract more students from outside the province and Peter has been tasked with finding resources for the TESOL component of the online course. The university strategy has been vindicated to some extent by the coronavirus and a surge in online interest but Peter has little guidance concerning what materials are suitable for TESOL online. The existing approach has been to transfer face-to-face materials and pedagogy online whereas Peter, in line with commentators such as Morris & Stommel (2018), is not convinced that online teaching simply replicates approaches which work in a physical classroom. For example, paralinguistic clues, such as gesture and facial expression, are important for classroom management and engagement but body language does not come across so well through a screen. Compensatory strategies noted by Moore et al. (2016) in their analysis of online interaction are the use of emoticons and the chatbox. In addition, while far from an authority on copyright, Peter worries about the legality of some of the material the university has provided online.

Accordingly, Peter looks for alternatives. Given that piracy is ubiquitous (Baensch, 2017; Domon

et al., 2019), he resolves on OER as the only way to ensure copyright is not contravened. Many OER initiatives are individual outputs but Peter thinks that there will be more quality in what Weller (2012, p. 7) terms “big OER”, i.e., large collections of OER maintained and vetted by institutions with considerable financial backing. One of these is [MERLOT](#). From this vast collection, Peter commits to locating licensed material which fulfills three aims:

- i. It is conducive to academic speaking. Initial student feedback from online TESOL courses indicates that they want more speaking opportunities.
- ii. It involves a degree of criticality. Through the lens of critical pedagogy (see Bradshaw, 2017), this can be articulated as empowering students to reflect on issues and engage higher-order cognitive skills in challenging their assumptions. Peter believes criticality to be a marker of university-level instruction.
- iii. It relates to the topic of the coronavirus. Peter wants to exploit the relevance of the current crisis in a second-language medium.

A keyword search locates a curated collection of links to [resources related to the coronavirus](#). The Creative Commons license for this resource is the most permissive available, even allowing users to change and sell the content. Most of the links on this site connect to resources for educators and cover a range of themes such as online tuition, the classroom discourse of pandemics and social distancing. Peter devises the following task, Table 3, connected to the OER.

Table 3

OER Academic Speaking Task

1. You will be divided into groups by your tutor.
2. You will prepare and deliver a 15-minute online group presentation answering the question, *How is the coronavirus affecting education?*
3. Base the content of your presentation on at least one resource from this open educational resource:
<https://www.merlot.org/merlot/viewMaterial.htm?id=773401928>
4. As part of your presentation, evaluate the resources you use and comment on their contribution to the fight against the coronavirus.
5. Make a timetable of the presentations for the whole cohort.
6. Give your presentation and attend the presentations of other groups.
7. Agree on a format, spoken and/or written, to reflect on your own presentation and those of other groups.

Peter then considers how the OER address his three aims. The first aim, to focus on academic speaking, is satisfied because the goal is a group presentation. This is a standard EAP speaking task as it replicates a conventional academic form of disseminating information. Speaking is also involved in preparation for the presentation as students liaise. The second aim, to involve criticality, is met because of the activity type. The OER task is very open, it is not a worksheet, so students must reach a consensus about what material is suitable, how they interpret it and use it within their presentation. The dynamic of teamwork also fosters criticality as individuals must negotiate their place and responsibilities in the team (see Salas et al., 2005). The third aim, to exploit the coronavirus topic, is addressed because coronavirus is the overarching theme. The guiding question, *How is the coronavirus affecting education?*, is one

which the students can directly relate to. It may cause them to reflect on the delivery of this TESOL course and technological affordances which could enhance it.

4 Reflection

None of the three case studies record the actual outcomes but this is critical to evaluating the effectiveness of OER in TESOL within a university setting. This reflection section thus considers how these scenarios might play out and what obstacles may need to be overcome for the OER intervention to be successful.

Case study one represents my own attempt to support teachers transitioning to online instruction through a lesson observation instrument devised from OER. The assumption is that lesson observation is welcomed by teachers. The same BALEAP discussion list (2020b) shows this may be far from the case for some individuals:

Why would you want to add that [observation] to any teacher's stress levels at this time? What insurmountable obligations do you have to observe teaching staff? Do they still apply under these extraordinary circumstances? If a teacher specifically asked for developmental observation to support their transition to working online, that might be justified, but shouldn't observations (particularly for QC [quality control] purposes) be off the management agenda until we all have a better sense of the 'new normal'?

This view may not be representative but it taps into a fear that observation is primarily for quality control within a neo-liberal approach to management. Furthermore, when observation is perceived as a standard-setting exercise, teachers may suspect there are consequences for those who do not meet the required standard. All the work perfecting the observation procedure would be wasted if teachers regarded it as a threat to their general standing and future employability.

To counter this, I will need to be transparent with teachers joining the pre-session course on the purpose of observation and the perceived value. It is helpful that one of the OER involved, the peer observation guide taken from an online forum, does just this and teachers could be referred to this document. I would also encourage teachers to regard observation as training which will benefit them beyond their summer contract. Due to the coronavirus, there is every indication that online provision will extend well into the new academic year starting in Europe in September (Wakefield, 2020). Teachers who can adapt will be best equipped to deliver in a job market which may become very competitive.

As regards the second and third case studies, Maria's programme to teach academic writing to faculty and Peter's inclusion of OER in a distance-learning course, both expect participants to exercise a high degree of autonomy and criticality. The instructors led by Maria have to give feedback on one another's grant proposals. This is a demanding task. Even if an instructor is reviewing a proposal in their own field, it may pursue a direction which the reviewer is unfamiliar with. Also, subject specialists are not TESOL teachers so realistically the linguistic feedback they could confidently provide would be limited. Peter's students are required to adapt to teamwork and within this environment follow multiple paths of enquiry, some of which will be dead ends, and combine elements into a coherent presentation. Without time and training, this would be daunting even if done in their first language. Gourlay (2015) believes that such over-ambition is endemic in the OER discourse and "based on a fundamentally utopian belief in the existence of absolute power/knowledge and efficiency in education" (p. 311). In reality, OER users will have mixed profiles and even when highly motivated the ability to perform at a level which makes maximum use of OER may simply be lacking.

A further consideration for Maria and Peter is the effectiveness of group work in exploiting OER. While collaboration is a staple of the communicative methodology in TESOL, most of the

supporting evidence, for example, Cruickshank et al. (2012), comes from a face-to-face context. The notion of group, and community generally, in an environment where members may never see one another physically, today due to physical distancing as much as geographical barriers, is bound to be qualitatively different. Indeed, there is evidence (e.g., Elgort et al., 2008) from studies of online group interaction that this format does not work for at least some students. Group work is not a condition for OER but when OER do incorporate interaction between participants, it must be recognised that online introduces an unknown variable which is difficult to control for.

Turning to the three case studies as a totality, it is important to consider the OER use in terms of Wiley's (2014) 5Rs of Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix and Redistribute discussed earlier. The golden grail of OER is to adapt resources from the original and repurpose them for the new context, the Revise and Remix elements of Wiley (2014). In the first case study, I am shown in the process of adapting the observation guide to the needs of my language centre. However, there is no adaptation of the material in the second and third case studies. Maria and Peter use the OER creatively, especially considering that these OER were originally developed for non-*TESOL* environments, but the material is not altered. There are restrictions imposed by the licenses but the majority of OER allow modification of the material at least for personal use (some allow adapted versions to be distributed and even sold on). Most instructors behave as Maria and Peter and do not adapt OER (Arinto et al., 2017), which is why commentators such as Ehlers (2011) are still correct to refer to OER in terms of potential rather than full realisation.

Finally, case studies however well described face an external validity issue in that it is always questionable how far the results can be extrapolated to different environments (Denscombe, 2010, p. 62). The coronavirus represents perhaps a unique perspective on this because it is (hopefully) a one-off disruption to everyday activity, the likes of which will not repeat in our lifetime. The predicament of all protagonists in these case studies is heightened by the coronavirus: I need a new strategy to support teachers distantly; Maria is faced with financial constraints; Peter is made aware of the lack of legitimate resources. However, the coronavirus should not be seen as the defining characteristic of these cases. Rather, the coronavirus exacerbates existing concerns which remain relevant to online tuition. It is conceivable that OER have a demonstrable value in *TESOL* within a university setting that will outlive short-lived pragmatism enforced by the coronavirus.

5 Conclusion

The coronavirus is challenging *TESOL* instructors in ways that are in part limited to the duration of the crisis, for example, strict physically distancing rules, and in ways that may outlast the pandemic, for instance, the contraction of public finances for the university sector. While the coronavirus itself is an ill for society, positive change is also possible along the same short and long-term dimensions. An example of the latter is instructors' upskilling to cope with delivering *TESOL* online. It is posited that OER belong to the long-term solutions because they invest teachers with control of the learning process. This is more than materials selection as the real value of OER lies in how they are integrated into the curriculum to fuel a pedagogy more tightly linked to learners' needs.

The fact remains that most instructors know little about OER and at the present time have more immediate priorities than experimenting with approaches that take them yet further from their comfort zone. Furthermore, it is difficult to make an empirical case for OER to instructors because the research base, particularly the link between OER and pedagogy, is fragmentary, with minimal representation in *TESOL*. Predictions of the impact of the coronavirus on education are typically polarised between the hailing of a new world order and a return to normality. At the time of writing an end is not in sight so it would be premature to comment on eventualities. What can be said in a *TESOL* context is that at the very least the coronavirus represents a testing ground for raising awareness of and experimenting

with OER. Whether a fully-fledged commitment to OER develops beyond this period will depend on TESOL as a field engaging in the issues OER raise.

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