

# The Ethics of OER

Are there any?

# What Are Open Educational Resources?

Open Educational Resources (OER) are learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others.

(UNESCO 2019)



# **What We'll Cover**

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# Agenda

1. Ethical access to information
2. Problems with the existing educational publishing model
3. OER as an ethical solution to those problems
4. The potential drawbacks of OER

# Information Access

is a human right

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# The Right to Information Access

Information access is the act of creating, disseminating, organizing, and preserving information for a given population

(Knox, 2019)



# Freedom to Read

The widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous by the majority

(American Library Association, 2004)

# UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights

19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.
26. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(United Nations, 1948)



# Publisher Oligarchy

and why it's a problem

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# The Big Five

- Five educational publishers account for 90% of the textbook market
- Total revenue is \$8.03B per year
- Increasing by almost \$1B per year

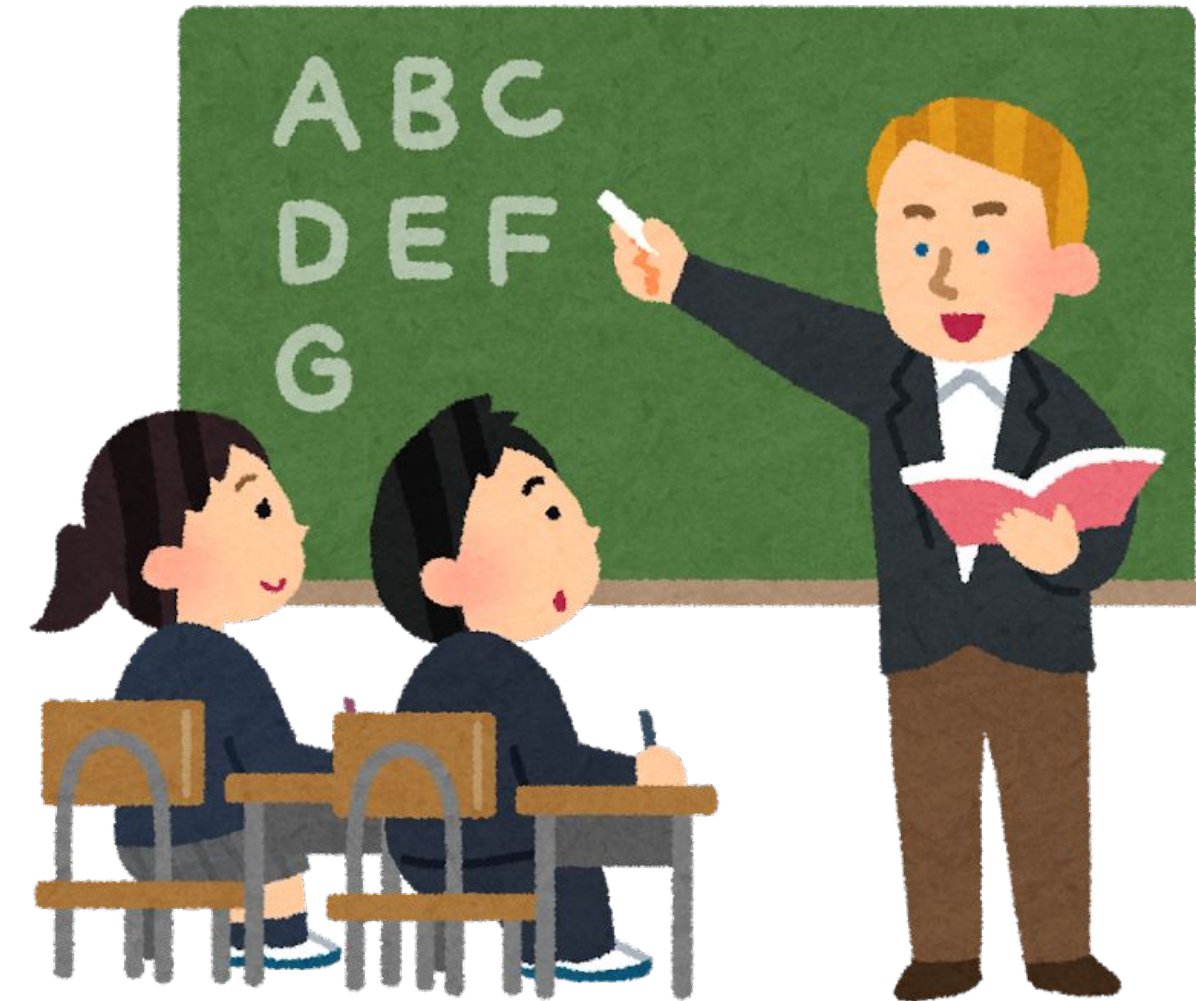
(Talbot & Curcic, 2023)



# Limited Viewpoints

- Entrenches existing inequalities
- Centers majority viewpoints
- No economic incentive to serve minority populations

(Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Tang & Bao, 2020)



# Costs

- K-12 textbook costs: \$743/year
- Average K-12 textbook: \$72
- University textbook costs: \$1346/year
- Average university textbook: \$105

(Hanson, 2022; Talbot & Curcic, 2023)



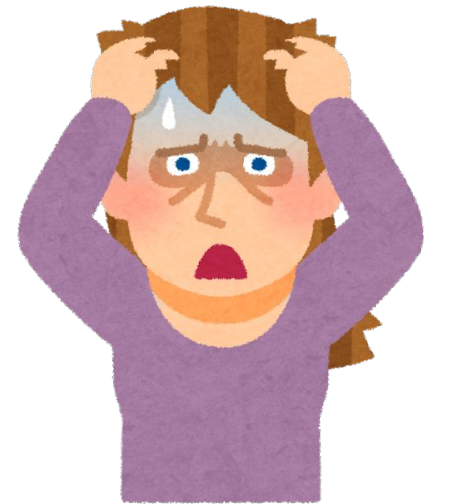
# Copyrights

- Life of the author plus 70 years
- Restrictions on what can be done with the contents

(Pressman, 2008)



**OH NO...**



# Is OER The Answer?

How can we decide?

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# Lambert's 3 R's of EOR Social Justice

- Redistributive justice
- Recognitive justice
- Representational justice

(Lambert, 2018)



# Diversification Of Publishing

- Publish through school or university
- Publish through online non-profit or commercial platforms
- Self-publish





# Costs

“The program to date has saved students an estimated quarter of a million dollars in textbook costs” over 3 years.

(Seiferle-Valencia, 2020)

“I have no expendable income. Without this free text I would not be able to take this course.”

(Bliss et al., 2013)



# Authorship

- Incorporate students in curriculum creation
- Broaden historical perspectives by including viewpoints of women, BIPOC, and GSRM
- Introduce learners to concepts around critically evaluating and interrogating authoritative sources

(Cragwall, 2023; Lambert, 2018; Seiferle-Valencia, 2020)



# Copyleft

- Retain
- Revise
- Remix
- Reuse
- Redistribute

(Wiley, 2001)



# No Silver Bullets

*new solutions, new problems*

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# Authorship Bias

Professors who utilize OER resources of their own production perceive OER resources differently than those who do not.

(Hilton, 2016)



# Funding Sources

- Grants
- Student fees
- Corporate partnerships
- Piled onto educators' existing duties
- No clear consensus

(Colson et al., 2017; Hofer, 2017)



# Digital Divides

- First-level digital divide: lack of access to ICTs and materials
- Second-level digital divide: lack of expertise to use, modify and redistribute materials

(Strover et al., 2020; Tang & Bao, 2020)

**Let's Recap**

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# The Ethics of OER

OER allows us to

- Break up the oligarchy and democratize/diversify resource production
- Shift cost burden away from students and decrease overall costs
- Avoid copyright restrictions to allow more flexible uses of resources
- Realize Lambert's three R's of OER social justice

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