

# Getting started with OER: a guide to finding, reviewing, and creating

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*This presentation is aimed at educators interested in exploring open educational resources (OER) for the adult classroom. For those new to OER, it will introduce and explain the benefits of their use in adult education, and provide resource recommendations and a step by step guide for how to get started. For the experienced OER user, it will discuss insights from our research and efforts curating and testing OER resources. The insights are drawn from the experiences of educators who hail from 21 states and a variety of classroom types—including community colleges, community centers, correctional facilities, and local education agencies.*

## Introduction

Open Education Resources (OER) have been supported and advocated globally by government agencies for several years. Much of the effort and funding has been at the primary and secondary school level. The research reported in this presentation was funded by the United States Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). The work conducted during the project explored the rationale for the use of OER in adult mathematics education, identified repositories for suitable material, and supported classroom teachers as they incorporated OER into their unique environment and student populations.

## **Power in Numbers: Helping Adult Students Learn Mathematics**

This project is a response by the United States Department of Education to the nationally recognized problem that math skills significantly affect employability and career options and the fact that many adults lack access to high-quality education and training experiences. It spanned three years, 2016 to 2019, and produced three market scan publications that made a case for the usefulness of OER in adult mathematics education while encouraging educational technology providers to publish work specific to that audience. The principal investigating body, Luminary Labs, was guided in their research by a team of subject matter experts (SME) of whom the presenter was one. The Luminary Labs staff coordinated the fieldwork that was undertaken to explore and evaluate the practicality of incorporating OER into adult mathematics classrooms.

## The Participants

There were nine subject matter experts, some of whom may be familiar to adult educators – Iddo Gal, Jo Boaler, and John Comings – and others who produced educational technology or managed its storage and access and might be less familiar. They met four times for “summits” only one of which was in-person in Washington, DC. The other three were virtual meetings conducted using free teleconference software. That, in itself, represented an application of technology that could be used for instruction. Several of the subject matter experts also conducted month-long discussions with the members of the second group of participants, the classroom teachers.

Two cohorts of educators, 37 in all, accessed OER that they thought appropriate for their courses, incorporated the OER into their instructional materials, and reviewed their particular resource for its content and utility. Over 100 resources were reviewed by the teacher cohorts. The second group, some of whom were also members of the first cohort, worked in teams to produce curriculum guides (lessons plans) that benefitted from the use of an OER.

## The Products

In addition to the OER reviews and curriculum guides, three reports have been published by the staff at Luminary Labs summarizing the needs of the adult mathematics education community, the potential for OER, and the case for developing and marketing OER products directed towards the adult mathematics education community. These reside on the Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) at [lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/power-in-numbers](https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/power-in-numbers). The reports are:

- The Math Gap: Implications for Investing in America’s Workforce
- Multiplying Impact: Five Frameworks for Investment in EdTech for Adult Learners
- From Creation to Adoption: How to Develop and Deploy Successful EdTech
- An additional summary report and videos will be released this summer.

## Recommendations for Implementation

This presentation offers a summary of curated American OER collections and suggestions for implementing OER in coursework. Comments from the cohort educators will be shared as well as a brief summary of the work from one project in the state of Georgia. Educators from the cohorts were enthusiastic in their response to the project but shared caveats about issues of quality and applicability as well as time demands for first time users. The LINCS community is broader than this project and additional LINCS resources are cited.

## Reflections of the Presenter

Earlier presentations at ALM about *Power in Numbers* raised questions of concern to researchers and practitioners. One is the question of access which is still not universally equitable and referred to in the media as the *digital divide*. A second is the broader question of ownership of educational products. The open access nature of OER diminishes traditional copyright protection and the profit, however small, that results from academic publications. Intimately tied to that question is that of “Who owns materials produced within an educational institution?” The answer varies and the permission to allow open access may be out of the hands of the author.

## References

- Luminary Labs (2017). The Math Gap: Implications for Investing in America’s Workforce. Retrieved May 26, 2019 from [https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Advancing\\_Math\\_Market\\_Scan\\_1.pdf](https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Advancing_Math_Market_Scan_1.pdf)
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