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Open Pedagogy

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Open Pedagogy   Open Education   OER-enabled pedagogy   Open Educational Practices

Open pedagogy is a set of teaching practices built on the foundation of the open education community's shared values, including but not limited to student agency, sharing, diversity and inclusion, peer learning, renewable assignments, co-creation/collaboration, and active/experiential learning. Though there is a lack of consensus around the definition of open pedagogy, it most often refers to student involvement in the development of course content in the form of renewable assignments or the creation or adaptation of open educational resources (OER). The practice of open pedagogy may result in or overlap with OER-enabled pedagogy and open educational practices.

As noted by Witt (2020) in "Towards a Working Definition of Open Pedagogy," the definition of open pedagogy has undergone a process of definition, redefinition, and adaptation through time. In fact, some researchers (Witt, 2020; Year of Open, 2018) have labeled open pedagogy as "undefinable." As initially defined by Wiley (2013), open pedagogy occurs when students and faculty take advantage of the "5 Rs" of openly licensed content (retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute) to expand learning opportunities in the classroom. Other scholars specifically define open pedagogy as an approach to teaching in which students join the academic conversation of a topic by creating course materials that they can choose to share with an open license. This may involve creating assignments that are "renewable," (Wiley & Hilton, 2018) meaning they have utility beyond the classroom. Others have connected open pedagogy to theoretical teaching approaches, such as experiential learning, peer learning, and student-centered learning. For some instructors, open pedagogy also has a close relationship to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Examples of these and other open pedagogical practices can be found in the Open Pedagogy Notebook and Project Roadmap listed in additional resources. The variety in definitions is further complicated by similar terms used in the open education community. Wiley and Hilton later defined "OER-enabled pedagogy" as teaching using open educational resources (OER), which is very similar to the original definition of open pedagogy, further muddying the waters.

Because there is significant variation in the use of the term "open pedagogy," and because the term is sometimes used interchangeably with similar ones, such as "OER-enabled pedagogy" and "open educational practices," here we provide a very broad and flexible definition: Open pedagogy is a set of teaching practices built on the foundation of the open education community's shared values, which are varied. These values may include engaging with the global community, sharing openly licensed content, using student-centered approaches, asserting student agency, and increasing diverse and inclusive curriculum and content. These values help us to understand what open pedagogy means and how it can be used in education.

At its heart, open pedagogy is the process of involving students in the creation, adaptation, and/or dissemination of openly licensed content. While some consider the mere use of OER in curriculum to be open pedagogy, OER-enabled pedagogy may be a better description of that. Whether using or creating openly licensed materials, these resources allow students to engage with a global community. A common description of open pedagogy assignments that involve student creation is that they are "renewable" rather than "disposable," (Wiley & Hilton, 2018) due to the ability of students to build customizable resources and contribute to a larger conversation. Course assignments that involve the adaptation or creation of openly licensed resources can lead to improved diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in course materials by providing opportunities for diverse student voices to be heard.

Open pedagogy assignments can create an environment for student-centered learning by allowing individual learners to shape their own learning experiences. Additionally, experiential learning, or learning through active and relevant classroom experiences, occurs when students are involved in open pedagogical activities, such as building an open textbook. Student agency is a core value of open pedagogy. Student privacy, vulnerability, equity, inclusion, and agency must be thoroughly considered when designing course curriculum with open pedagogical projects. Legally and ethically speaking, students should not and cannot be coerced or mandated into identifying themselves in openly licensed materials or required to openly license their assignments for course credit or a grade. Instructors must also be aware of potential power differentials with students. For example, if a student is uncomfortable openly licensing their work, they may fear a negative impact on their grade. Adhering to the value of student agency requires obtaining full permission from students before openly publishing any of their work. The use, intent, and future implications of the project, as well as how the licensing will work, should be made clear in the learning objectives. Some students may experience social anxiety that could dissuade them from fully committing to a project, so it is essential for each student to not only understand what is being asked of them, but what will happen with a project after it is finished. Open pedagogy can still take place as an instructional practice even if all students in a course ultimately choose not to openly license their work.

Additionally, the sharing and licensing of traditional knowledge related to Indigenous communities should be honored. Students working on projects related to cultural or Indigenity topics should respect the autonomy and authority of said peoples and defer to their resources by seeing what has already been shared and cited. While indigenous cultures may be willing to and often do share their traditions and knowledge, care should be taken not to remix, co-opt, or colonize sacred or cultural materials. Guidance can be found in BCcampus' Indigenization guides, listed in additional resources.

Related Terms

- Open Educational Resources

Open education; OER-enabled pedagogy; Open-enabled practices; Diversity, equity, and inclusion; Experiential learning; Student agency; Openly licensed

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Additional Resources

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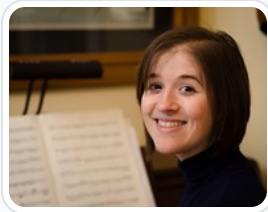
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Jeanne Hoover is Head of Scholarly Communication at Academic Library Services at East Carolina University. She leads the Scholarly Communication team in supporting faculty and student scholarly communication needs on campus. In this role, she helps coordinate ECU's mini-grant textbook program, provides workshops on scholarly communication topics, and manages the institutional repository. She is also active in state-wide OER and textbook affordability initiatives. She was a 2018-2019 SPARC Open Education Leadership Fellow and she has been an instructor in the Open Education Network's Certificate in OER Librarianship.

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Michael Whitchurch is the OER and Media Literacy Librarian at Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library. He received his MLIS from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where his passion for the convergence of information and technology took root. His previous positions include Instruction Librarian, WebCT Administrator, Information/Learning Commons Librarian, Virtual Services Librarian, and department chair for the Information, Media and Digital Services Department. He currently leads the OER efforts at BYU in part by chairing the BYU Affordable Course Materials Working Group. He also provides strategic guidance to the Software Training, Media Production, and Makerspace units of the library.