

# A WCET Closer Look at Open Pedagogy

## Overview of Topic

Now more than ever, affordable learning materials are crucial for student access, equity, and success. The [Florida Virtual Campus' 2022 Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey](#) demonstrates that the cost of commercial textbooks continues to negatively impact students. With free access to learning materials, Open Educational Resources (OER) have steadily gained use over the past decade – spurred further by the COVID-19 pandemic due to their often-digital format.

OER are part of a larger Open movement that advocates for universal access to knowledge. Although one of the primary benefits of OER to students is affordability, another advantage is that they can be customized to fit within the context of specific courses and to meet the needs of specific students.

One impactful set of practices that can harness this advantage is Open Pedagogy, which engages students in content creation and learning processes through Open knowledge. Open Pedagogy not only asks “what do you teach with?” but “how do you teach?” Evidence suggests that Open Pedagogy leads to positive student outcomes and can enhance student engagement (see [“The why of open pedagogy: a value-first conceptualization for enhancing instructor praxis”](#)).

This Closer Look provides related definitions, takeaways for higher education practitioners, considerations related to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA), and considerations related to policies and/or regulations.

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## Definitions

### *Open Educational Resources*

The nonprofit organization [Creative Commons](#) provides the following definition of Open Educational resources (OER): “Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research materials that are either (a) in the public domain or (b) licensed in a manner that provides everyone with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R activities” – which include the ability to retain, revise, remix, reuse, and redistribute the resources. The key distinguishing factor of this type of educational resource is copyright status. If course content is under a traditional, all-rights-reserved copyright, then it’s not an OER. If it resides in the public domain or has been licensed for adaptation and distribution, then it is an OER. Creative Commons provides the most widely used [open licenses](#).

### *Open Pedagogy*

Open Pedagogy is a series of practices which involve engaging students in a course through the development, adaptation, use, and sharing of Open Educational Resources. As Robin DeRosa and Rajiv Jhangiani explain in the [Open Pedagogy Notebook](#):

*“We might think about Open Pedagogy as an access-oriented commitment to learner-driven education AND as a process of designing architectures and using tools for learning that enable students to shape the public knowledge commons of which they are a part. We might insist on the centrality of the 5 Rs to this work, and we might foreground the investments that Open Pedagogy shares with other learner-centered approaches to education” (DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2017).*

They further explain: “If we merge OER advocacy with the kinds of pedagogical approaches that focus on collaboration, connection, diversity, democracy, and critical assessments of educational tools and structures, we can begin to understand the breadth and power of Open Pedagogy as a guiding praxis.”

Open Pedagogy can support inclusive learning and culturally responsive teaching, personalized content, and enhanced learner (and instructor) engagement.

## Main Takeaways

A key takeaway is that Open Pedagogy (OP) is a set of practices that harness the affordances of Open Educational Resources to support learner success. These practices are a part of a larger community seeking open access to knowledge and social justice through education. If your institution decides to explore Open Pedagogy as a part of its Open Education Practices, including creating, adopting, and adapting OER, the following are three takeaways to consider for that work:

### 1. Determine the “Why”

Although institutions often begin OER initiatives to support student access to affordable learning materials, there are additional, perhaps even more impactful, benefits to OER that OP can support. While these practices should be at the discretion of faculty members to decide how they can support the learning outcomes of a course or program, the institution can encourage Open Pedagogy by educating faculty about the OP strategies:

- Student-centered/-directed learning – instead of a product to be absorbed and regurgitated, course content becomes a process that depends on student investment to be fully effective.
- Student engagement – students feel more challenged and invested in their learning and a part of a community of learners/scholars that includes the instructor.
- Student contributions – instead of developing knowledge and products only for a course, students contribute to the knowledge commons, not just consume from it, in meaningful and lasting ways.
- Instructor engagement – developing and implementing Open Pedagogies, which can include rethinking learning outcomes, aligning course materials to them, and re-designing assessments, can engage faculty members and revitalize their teaching methods and processes.

### 2. Explore the “How”

#### *Renewable Assignments*

Renewable assignments (the opposite of disposable assignments) are assignments which students create for the purpose of sharing and releasing as OER so that others can use and build on them. These can range from individual writing assignments in Wikipedia to collaboratively written textbooks. Asking students to help reframe and re-present course content in new and inventive ways can add valuable OER to the Open Education community while also allowing for the work that students do in courses to go on to have meaningful impact even after the course ends. Some tools for implementing and publishing renewable assignments include Google Drive, [Pressbooks](#), [Hypothes.is](#), [Synthesia](#), [Wikibooks](#) & [WikiEdu](#), and [YouTube](#).

## *Open Course Design*

OP facilitates building course policies, outcomes, assignments, rubrics, and schedules of work collaboratively with students. Once we involve students in creating or revising OER or in shaping learning architectures, we can begin to see the syllabus as more of a collaborative document, co-generated at least in part with our students. Students may also assist in curating course content.

## *Considerations for Using Open Pedagogy*

Instructors should keep in mind how OP may affect students and how they will support students through any course changes. Here are several strategies and issues to consider:

- Educational opportunities for students about open licenses, such as Creative Commons,
- Giving students control over their work, for example, letting them choose (with guidance) the open license they are comfortable with once shared,
- Respect for students' privacy. Allow the students to opt out of making their materials public if they are uncertain about doing so, and
- Scaffolding learning through techniques such as:
  - interactive exercises to help students work through new concepts,
  - tutorials on how to use any technology or tool needed to engage in Open Pedagogies; and
  - using blogs and discussion posts to introduce the concept of writing for and to a public audience.

## What are some examples of what other higher ed institutions or organizations are doing related to this topic?

Many institutions and their faculty (often with the assistance of staff such as instructional designers and librarians) are engaging in OP in innovative and exciting ways.

Andy Gurevich at Mt. Hood Community College developed [Culturally Responsive Composition: A Writer's Handbook](#) for college courses that require critical thinking and essay writing skills. The openly-licensed text includes creative contributions by students on such wide-ranging topics as “Myth and Monsters in *Stranger Things*,” “Artificial Intelligence Will Greatly Alter Healthcare,” and “Social Media Echo Chambers.”

At Austin Community College, Allegra Villarreal developed and edited [An Open Companion to Early British Literature](#), with over 100 students contributing footnotes, introductory chapters, digital learning objects, and test bank questions with a student audience in mind.

Student contributions to Wikipedia to enhance its content, including for accuracy and diversity, is becoming increasingly common. At Santa Clara University, Kimberly Ivey – pursuing her doctorate in educational leadership – learned that many STEM figures from historically marginalized communities lack Wikipedia articles. So she created an entry for [Eugene M. DeLoatch](#), who founded the School of Engineering at Morgan State University, Maryland's only HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), where he spent his career educating African American engineers. For more info on Ivy's process, see [“Telling the story of an African American engineer on Wikipedia.”](#)

## Considerations for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

Open Pedagogy is a part of a larger Open movement, including Open Access Data and Research, Open Source Code, and OER. The roots of this movement lie in social justice, and its goals are in part to support more equitable and inclusive access to knowledge. The affordances of open licensing facilitate OP methods to customize educational resources to be more diverse, inclusive, and reflective of students using them while offering a wide range of perspectives – including those of students who may develop OER and engage in open course design.

As Abbey Elder points out in [The OER Starter Kit](#), OP can be a powerful tool to advance inclusivity and to let “students take control over how they engage with and relate to their course content. In some ways, engaging students in the creation of OER can be the ultimate way of helping students see themselves reflected in their work.” However, she cautions against “othering” students and offers some techniques for avoiding this:

- Never assume your audience’s gender and/or gender identity, ability, or sexual orientation,
- Avoid calling the most commonly seen traits in your context “normal,”
- Always make materials accessible for all students.

Keep in mind that OER are not inherently inclusive, so educators should make intentional efforts to critique both OER and traditional resources and seek out materials (or adapt or create) that are inclusive.

A useful resource developed by the organization [DOERS3](#) is [The OER Equity Blueprint](#), created by member systems and statewide/provincewide initiatives to “define, unpack, and explain the multiple dimensions of equity and foreground the role of OER in closing equity gaps.” The tool can assist Open Pedagogy practitioners in adopting “equity mindedness,” a perspective or mode of thinking exhibited by those who call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes.

### *DEI and Technology*

As educators, we have legal and ethical obligations to ensure that our courses are fully accessible to all learners. Although OER and OP can support accessibility in some very impactful ways, you can’t assume that all OER and methods for using them are fully accessible. Like DEI efforts, instructors must be intentional in evaluating OER and their use for accessibility and proactive in mitigating any barriers to access for *all* students. Fortunately, many resources have been developed to assist, like BCcampuses’ openly-licensed [Accessibility Toolkit – 2nd Edition](#).

## More Information



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## About WCET

WCET is the leader in the practice, policy, & advocacy of digital learning in higher education. We are a member-driven organization that brings together colleges, universities, higher education organizations, and companies to collectively improve the quality and reach of digital learning programs.

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## Featured Author

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