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Book Review: Pedagogy Opened: Innovative Theory and Practice

Editor: Tiffani Tijerina (University of North Georgia Press, 2024, 230 pages). ISBN: 978-1-940771-43-4 (paperback, \$29.99), ISBN: 978-1-959203-09-4 (HTML: <https://ung.edu/university-press/books/pedagogy-opened-innovative-theory-and-practice.php>)

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Introduction

As the first volume in a new open access monograph series, *Pedagogy Opened: Innovative Theory and Practice* sets out to weave together strands from the rapidly growing field of open pedagogy while catalyzing critical conversation and challenging further evolution. Refreshingly, this series is edited by an early career scholar, drawing on her significant experience as an open education practitioner and taking seriously the responsibility to amplify diverse and new voices.

Given that open pedagogy is closely related to critical pedagogy and explicitly oriented towards social justice, it is fitting that the advisory board for this series thoughtfully guided the process through these values, drafted a powerful equity statement (which appears in the front matter), and developed equity-focused guidelines for submission review. The result is a collection of seven thought-provoking discussions of theory at the intersection of “teaching and learning practices and environments that promote equity, collaboration, and innovation and invite students to create and share knowledge with future publics, often in association with the use of open educational resources (OER)” (Tijerina, 2024, pp. viii–ix).

In this review I draw attention to some of the most powerful insights in this impressive debut, identify common themes across the seven essays, and offer a few suggestions for the subsequent volumes in this series.

Book Structure

The volume has been organized around seven essays, each of which was collaboratively authored or co-authored by faculty members at post-secondary institutions in the United States. Each chapter is followed by author biographies, four of which include extensive appendices ranging from interview responses and activity design worksheets to course and assignment details as well as links to examples of student work.

The essays are followed by an inspired final chapter showcasing 25 creative cover designs for the book submitted by undergraduate students in a visual design course. This delightful parting gift beautifully illustrates the power of renewable assignments, a popular approach to open pedagogy in which student work has a larger audience, a longer life, and a greater impact than traditional “disposable” assignments (Seraphin et al., 2019).

Key Insights

The opening chapter in the volume, contributed by Elaine Keys and Nicole Wilson, articulates the shared values of critical digital pedagogy and open pedagogy in the form of a values-based framework that guides decision-making across two classroom social justice projects. The framework invites educators and students to go “beyond OER and textbook adoption to see how their own pedagogical and educational goals—including creating more equitable learning spaces—can be realized through open pedagogy” (Tijerina, 2024, pp. 1–2). This values-based framework guides everything from an emphasis on good story stewardship and the amplification of student and faculty voices to the selection of publication venues and tailoring of open-ended reflection questions to invite co-creation of the narrative.

The chapter is enriched by the generous inclusion of excerpts from the reflections of faculty and students that honestly consider tensions, including the vulnerability of working in the open and the challenges of moving away from the banking model of education. Insightful and engaging reflections illustrate how open practices can be transformative for both educators and students. Indeed, having tasted the excerpts, I was strongly motivated to go on to feast on the lengthier reflections included in the Appendix. I was particularly struck by the affective dimension of these reflections, which included references to a feeling of personal responsibility, humility, a sense of reward, and the emotions of lived experience.

The second chapter by Bernd et al. also focuses on the implementation of open pedagogy in higher education, albeit relying on a hybrid digital infrastructure, some of which are open (e.g., Pressbooks, H5P) and some of which are not (e.g., Google Sites, Adobe Photoshop). The chapter includes a detailed overview of the implementation of open pedagogy assignments wherein the emphasis on offering students choice and voice was vindicated in the diverse approaches the students adopted. Once again, the chapter addresses practical concerns and challenges, including, for example, the use of pseudonyms to protect students’ identities, whether out of fear of retribution for expressing opinions or when sharing content that is outlawed by state-sanctioned repressive pedagogies.

The essay by Amaya et al. is a break from the higher education assessment context and looks at ways to advance more equitable K–8 education through open educational practices (OEP) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). The authors helpfully distill seven constructs associated with both OEP and CSP before sharing insights from four case studies. Highlights include reflections on discomfort of using the license to revise or remix open content (bottom-up approach) in the context of a requirement to adhere to standards (top-down approach). The tensions between a prevailing ideology of high stakes testing and the knowledge that fostering greater collaboration (instead of more competition) would lead to better learning are also addressed.

The fourth chapter by Goldoni and Mormino considers the unique advantages of using OER in world language classes where instructors have a “particular duty to focus on diversity and inclusivity” (Tijerina, 2024, p. 100). For example, the importance of gender and sexuality inclusive language not only because “the intimacy entailed in learning a world language requires instructors and learners to engage with a range of identities” (Tijerina, 2024, p. 99) but also because language carries the power to shape perceptions. The authors provide an engaging overview of the evolution of gender inclusive linguistic developments in several gendered European languages and demonstrate how this issue continues to be used as a lightning rod by

far-right groups around the world. A clear-eyed awareness of the challenges of progressive and inclusive approaches to OER help ground the chapter, even as the authors point to the necessity of circumventing the gatekeeping by traditional academies of language around the world.

Ferrier and Graybeal share a detailed case study of an immensely popular community of practice with media innovators and professionals in Ethiopia, as well as the collaborative development of a widely used open educational resource especially valuable in this dynamic field. The chapter demonstrates how grassroots groups can drive open education, create localized solutions, and build regional capacity. In some ways this chapter also serves as an important reminder of the enormous variation of contexts in which open pedagogues are working to advance social justice around the world (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018). In some cases educators are working to redress inequities related to affordability, accessibility, and discrimination, whereas in others, as with the case study presented in this chapter, they are “dancing with uncertainties” (Tijerina, 2024, p. 146) such as planning for rolling blackouts and Internet shutdowns while ensuring the physical safety of participants who may be learning under the threat of persecution.

The sixth chapter by Law and Powell tackles a different dimension of access and equity in higher education by sharing how the development of a hybrid course template and facilitator guide can serve last minute contingent faculty hires. Although this contribution includes valuable guidance concerning effective instructional practices for online hybrid courses, it appears in my reading to have a less direct connection with the central theme of the volume, despite one version of the developed course template utilizing OER and the course template itself being openly licensed and publicly available.

The final chapter shares autoethnographic accounts of working with OER and OEP, from the perspectives of a professor (Bartholomay) and a student (Otter). These are deeply moving accounts that lay bare the impact of high textbook costs on students, as well as how experiences with a university policy requiring textbooks to be procured through the university bookstore coupled with job precarity can shape the values and motivations of faculty members. The chapter is further enriched by an interrogation of assumptions concerning access to digital technologies, the training and labour required to work effectively with OER, the importance of aligning incentives for faculty (e.g., tenure and promotion criteria), and the imperative of enacting justice-based solutions. This chapter serves as a powerful reinforcement of the tone set throughout the book.

Overall Impression

While the volume includes several recurring themes (e.g., theoretical frameworks aligned with social justice, praxis, grassroots communities, cross-disciplinarity, political interference), in my view the two outstanding features of this book are its relentless focus on providing practical tips and guidance and the contributors’ desire to engage in honest and critical discussions of the many tension points that encase open pedagogy. It is precisely this openness to self-examination that renders this volume a notable contribution to the field and a valuable addition to the digital or print bookshelf of a new or experienced open pedagogue.

I would love to see future volumes in this series feature perspectives beyond the US post-secondary context (including from K–12 and vocational education and across more of the Global South), some critical analysis of the use of open source versus proprietary tools to support open pedagogy, and a more consistent connection to the theme of open pedagogy. Even so, this impressive debut volume has achieved its goal of deepening existing knowledge and sparking further conversations while setting the stage for the “rich and diverse series of publications” (Tijerina, 2024, p. xi) yet to come.

References

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