CAPSTONE FINAL REPORT

OPEN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

SPARC

Leveraging OER and Open Pedagogy to Promote EDI in the Classroom

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Abstract

In the last few years, Canadian universities and colleges have been increasing their institutional efforts to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) for equity-deserving students. These efforts include updating and enhancing policies, increasing the number of EDI-related positions, developing EDI action plans, providing professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators to increase awareness, and developing initiatives to promote EDI in the curricula and research for equity-deserving students (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2021; York University, 2020; Universities Canada, 2019). There have also been ongoing discussions on leveraging OER to promote EDI for students. Open educational resources (OER) reduce the cost barrier for students to access course materials. Studies have suggested that OER can positively impact disadvantaged students' ability to enroll in and complete their courses. Recent OER discussions have shifted from just cost savings to how educators can create content and activities that focus on marginalized students' learning interests and cultural backgrounds.

My main project for the SPARC Open Education Leadership program was a research paper that explored how OER and open pedagogy can help promote EDI in the classroom. The paper addressed the following questions:

1. Who can benefit from OER?
2. Why should educators consider adapting or creating OER through an EDI lens?
3. How can OER and open pedagogy improve EDI for equity deserving students and support learning for all students?
4. When does open not serve students or a community?
5. What is decolonizing and Indigenizing education in the context of open?

To encourage readers to explore OER and open pedagogy in their own contexts, the paper ends with:

6. Considerations for faculty and academic leaders
7. Concluding thoughts related to outstanding questions for further exploration

8. Additional resources

The community resources for this project are: 1) a research paper that synthesizes the key arguments and examples related to the aforementioned questions, and 2) a slide deck that highlights the key points made in the research paper. The resources have been made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) Licence for anyone to freely copy, use, share, adapt, and build upon.

The purpose of this project was to improve my knowledge of open education practices (OEP) in relation to promoting EDI for post-secondary students. The information I consulted will help me and my library colleagues further develop our OER initiatives for faculty and other stakeholders at Sheridan College. Since my institution "values diversity and strives to create an equitable and inclusive place to study and work" (Sheridan College, 2023), fostering awareness of the connections between OEP and EDI will likely help increase the adoption and acceptance of these practices by Sheridan faculty and administrators. I also hope that other open education advocates will find my community resources helpful in their own contexts.

Project Overview

Background

Leveraging OER and open pedagogy to promote EDI aligns with Sheridan's values and some of its strategic priorities. Sheridan is a college with three campuses in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, Canada, with 23,183 FTE students, 38% of whom are international students (based on 2022/2023 data provided by Sheridan's Integrated Planning and Analysis). Our campuses are diverse, multicultural communities. Sheridan's 2024 Strategic Plan highlights inclusion and equity as one of the key enablers to accomplish the identified priorities. In addition to the establishment of the Office of Inclusive Communities in 2020, Sheridan is also a participant in the Dimensions: EDI Canada Program, which focuses on increasing EDI in post-secondary research practices. OER and open pedagogy emphasize equitable and inclusive access to education, learner-centric approaches, flexible learning modalities, knowledge sharing, and collaborations with different communities. These principles are aligned with Sheridan's goals and values.

While there are several faculty champions at Sheridan who have adopted or created OER, I think more work can be done to promote awareness and acceptance of these resources and OEP. While many faculty are interested in OER's cost-saving benefit for students, other faculty are more concerned with getting their students interested in the course materials and increasing their motivation to participate and succeed in their learning. Framing OER as a tool to enable student equity and inclusion can help improve faculty's interests in these resources. Many faculty are already exploring ways to enhance EDI in their classrooms, so they will likely be interested in learning more about how OER and open pedagogy can be valuable tools to enhance their efforts.

Project Scope

Instead of creating a toolkit for my capstone project, I chose to write a research paper that synthesizes key points related to how OER and open pedagogy can support EDI for

students. I intended the paper to provide a general overview of the connections between open education and EDI, which can help others interested in exploring this topic. While I discussed the benefits and challenges of open pedagogy, the scope of my research paper did not allow me to cover the full range of faculty approaches and interventions related to student engagement. The paper includes selected examples of how faculty made their OER and teaching more inclusive to enhance readers' comprehension of the key points. It was not a comprehensive review of sources, partly due to the project's short timeframe of one semester. The sources I reviewed included scholarly articles, grey literature, reports, OER, and recorded presentations.

My initial research questions were: 1) Why should educators consider adapting or creating OER through an EDI lens 2) How can OER and open pedagogy enhance EDI for students? and 3) What does research reveal about diversified content and inclusive learning experiences on students' education?

Tasks

Here were my main tasks for the project:

1. Shared my project idea with the Diversity Librarian, the Library Director, and the Manager of Library Liaison and Research Support Services at my institution.
2. Created a project charter to outline the purpose, institutional and departmental goals the project aims to support, resources required, main and future benefits, opportunities and challenges, target audience, SMART goals, deliverables, a timeline of tasks, and evaluation plan. I also shared the project charter with my mentor through the SPARC OE Leadership Program for her feedback and suggestions.
3. Consulted with the Cooperative Education department, the Co-Curricular Recognition Program, and the Library Director to inquire about funding and the possibility of hiring students to assist with this project.
4. Confirmed that a student, who works for Learning Services and with whom I had previously collaborated on a different project, will be able to assist me in creating

a short video to highlight the key points from my paper in late spring or summer 2023.

5. Conducted searches for relevant sources:
    - Located scholarly articles in library databases (Academic Search Complete, Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts, and ProQuest's Library Science Database) as well as in Google Scholar.
    - Found articles, OER, and reports through Google searches.
    - Selected articles, presentations, and other pathfinders in library guides that cover open education and EDI.
    - Identified relevant recordings of presentations from past OER Week events and Open Education Conferences, which I have access to.
6. Read the selected articles and watched the recordings, which took approximately four weeks to complete.
7. Took notes from the sources reviewed and organized them based on these themes: accessibility, culturally responsive teaching, EDI issues in educational materials, faculty considerations, diversified OER, impact on learners, Indigenous knowledge, open pedagogy, and student needs.
8. Created an outline for the research paper and shared it with my mentor for feedback and suggestions.
9. Wrote the initial draft which took over three weeks to complete.
10. Shared the draft paper with the Library Director and the Manager of Library Liaison and Research Support Services for feedback.
11. Reached out to several individuals and groups to solicit reviewers for my paper:
    - Diversity, Sustainability & Materials Librarian at Sheridan
    - Liaison librarian team at Sheridan
    - Ontario Colleges Open Education Working Group for reviewers from other colleges
12. Shared my paper with my SPARC mentor, the Diversity Librarian, the Coordinator of the Library Teaching & Learning Program, and two open education practitioners from other colleges for their feedback.

13. Revised my paper based on the feedback and suggestions I received from those who read my draft.
14. Followed up with the student to confirm their availability to work on the video in June as planned.
15. Created a slide deck to highlight the key points from my research paper, which I plan to use in future workshops and presentations with faculty, as well as with the Office of Inclusive Communities and SPARK (formerly Centre for Teaching and Learning) at my college.

Evaluation

I identified several SMART goals in my project charter to be completed by the end of June. I have already accomplished the following goals as of mid-May: conducting research, writing a research paper, receiving feedback and suggestions from peers to improve my paper, and creating slides to highlight the key points of my findings. In the next few months, I will work on the remaining goals, which involve reaching out to the Office of Inclusive Communities and SPARK, as well as creating a video with a student.

For my project, my main evaluation plan was to obtain feedback and suggestions on my draft essay from several internal and external colleagues, in addition to my mentor. As indicated earlier, I contacted specific individuals and a provincial OER network for assistance. The timing of my request was a concern for me since it was near the end of the winter term and academic year at most institutions. However, I received more responses from colleagues offering to help than I anticipated. A cohort fellow also volunteered to provide feedback on my draft. People seemed interested to read about the intersection of OEP and EDI. I was also fortunate to have a group of reviewers with diverse expertise and in various positions. They offered helpful perspectives on aspects I overlooked or was unfamiliar with.

Overall, the feedback on my draft was positive. I was elated to receive multiple comments mentioning that my paper was well-researched and will be a useful resource to others who want to learn more about the topic. A colleague mentioned that they

learned something new from reading my paper. They also said that the additional resources included at the end of my paper will be helpful to consult with for their own open education work.

I received constructive feedback and suggestions for improvement on my paper. One reviewer noted that I had covered many topics and recommended that I focus on a few main points, using selected arguments and examples from sources to support them. Other reviewers suggested improvements in the organization of some sections, connecting ideas back to the initial three research questions, and clarifying some points. Some recommended expanding the section on decolonizing education. While a few suggestions were challenging to address given the timeline of this project, such as adding more examples of how faculty improve OER through an EDI lens, I intend to explore this in the future.

To disseminate my research findings, I plan to create a video highlighting the paper's key takeaways with the help of a student and share it with the Sheridan community. I also intend to present at various faculty meetings using the slides I created for the capstone project. I hope to be able to collaborate with the Office of Inclusive Communities and SPARK (formerly Centre for Teaching and Learning) at Sheridan to raise awareness of OER, open pedagogy and EDI. As part of my evaluation process, I intend to gather feedback from faculty and other stakeholders who watch the video or attend my presentations, using tools such as surveys.

Lessons Learned

Initially, I explored options for hiring a student to assist with the research, but the process was more complicated and required more advanced planning. Fortunately, my library director offered to hire a student and assisted with reaching out to Learning Services to inquire if a student would be interested in working with me. One of the managers from Learning Services has offered to have a student assist in my project. Due to time constraints, I have changed the student's tasks to creating a short video after I finish my research paper. This experience has been helpful for me to understand the process of hiring students for open education projects in the future.

I need to set aside the project momentarily and return to it when I can continue the work with a fresh perspective. I have found reading and writing about EDI and marginalized students inspiring and emotionally taxing. At different points of the project, I found myself relating to and contrasting my experiences with those of students and other educators I read about. The work required me to reflect upon my positionality and biases. Going forward, I am committed to continuing to learn more about EDI and finding opportunities to participate in EDI-related conversations in the open education community.

This project has improved my understanding of how to contextualize OEP within the priorities of my institution. It is also meaningful for my own professional and personal goals. My future goal is to raise awareness of the connections between OER and EDI in order to increase adoption of OER among faculty, foster collaboration with other stakeholders, and promote the integration of open education into campus initiatives.

Here are some suggestions for those interested in conducting secondary research on an open education topic:

- Define the scope of your research study and determine the type of literature review required. My research paper is not a comprehensive narrative review partly due to the time constraints.
- Create a project charter outlining aspects such as purpose, goals, tasks, deliverables, and required resources. Break down the tasks and set a realistic deadline for each.
- Look for live and recorded presentations available on your topic to find diverse examples of open education practices that may not be covered in traditional literature.
- Leverage social media to stay informed of recent publications and uncover grey literature, such as unpublished files in Google Docs, related to your topic.
- Seek feedback from peers who can provide valuable perspectives and suggestions to improve your work.
- Scale back or adjust your goals, tasks, and deliverables as needed while keeping in mind the larger purpose of your project.

- Celebrate milestones throughout your process!

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to live and work on the unceded territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations, Anishinaabe Nation, Huron-Wendat, and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. As an immigrant settler, I am thankful for the opportunities I have been given, and I recognize my responsibility to listen to the voices and concerns of Indigenous people and communities and to support Indigenous-led efforts towards reconciliation.

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