

CASE STUDY

The Open Page: A Case Study of Partnership as Open Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This case study draws on the concept of open pedagogy (Paquette, 1979; DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2018) to frame a student-faculty partnership project focused on creating videos about education technology. Four student research assistants were full partners and creators within this project, developing models and parameters for future contributions by both faculty members and fellow students. All partners contributed as creators, collaborators, and coordinators for aspects of the project. The case study explores how open pedagogy can be a meaningful foundation for Students-as-Partners (SaP) collaborations.

KEYWORDS

open pedagogy, open education, education technology, collaboration, tool parade

In higher education, most decision-making in teaching and learning is the domain of faculty and academic staff. This is a tenet of academic freedom, but it means that students often have minimal agency and voice (Mann, 2008) in programs and courses. This tends to hold true even in Faculties of Education, where students are learning to be teachers.

However, the lines between teacher and student leadership need not be so firmly drawn. As Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014) note, students and educators can “contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis” (pp. 6-7) and can be partners in the creation and enactment of teaching and learning endeavours. This paper outlines the case study of a Faculty of Education project that engaged Bachelor of Education students as decision-making partners within an open-education initiative. The project, titled *The Open Page*, models faculty-student partnership and open educational practices to the University of Windsor’s Faculty of Education and surrounding learning communities.

Central to this student-faculty partnership is the concept of open pedagogy, “a site of praxis . . . where theories about learning, teaching, technology and social justice enter into a conversation with each other” (DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2018, para 2). Morgan (2016) traces the

origins of open pedagogy back to Paquette (1979), who lays out three sets of foundational values for the practice: “autonomy and interdependence; freedom and responsibility; democracy and participation” (Morgan, 2016, para. 6). Open pedagogy focuses on practices and processes by which learners can share in authentic and active knowledge creation for real audiences, which aligns with the Students-as-Partners (SaP) approach and its challenge to student passivity (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Both pedagogies are high-impact practices focused on authenticity, community, and responsibility.

In alignment with that principle of active knowledge creation, the lead author of this article was part of the student team, supported by the principal investigator (PI). With research ethics board approval from the University of Windsor, the authors asked the project team for brief reflections on the experience, highlights, and challenges of working in partnership on The Open Page. Responses were submitted directly to the student author.

FROM IDEA TO OPEN PEDAGOGY PROJECT

The Open Page project developed out of a first-year Bachelor of Education course in digital technologies. The course’s aim was to engage pre-service teachers in meaningful digital literacy development, while also modelling open pedagogy values. Just as Graves (1994) and Kixmiller (2004) argue for the value of authentic audiences for writing instruction, the course’s pedagogical design focused on authentic audiences for pre-service teacher engagement with digital tools and practices. The idea for The Open Page came from a class assignment designed to evaluate and showcase digital educational platforms, as the PI of the project, Bonnie Stewart, explained:

It occurred to me that the work the students were doing exploring the implications of different tools could be of value to faculty members in our institution, to teachers practicing in local schools, and to members of open educational networks in spaces like Twitter. I realized the project could be extended into a living “tool parade.”

To bring the idea to life, the PI applied for two grants, which together resulted in the creation of a site hosted on the University of Windsor Faculty of Education web page. The Open Page features a “tool parade” of 14 short, captioned videos overviewing various digital classroom technologies, another 11 podcasts, plus pedagogical resources. Each video and podcast examines a different educational technology platform through three critical lenses: classroom uses, data implications, and differentiated learning. The Open Page site is also the backbone of the PI’s newly developed 2019-2020 service learning course.

Essentially, The Open Page partnership is about creating collaborative open resources and professional learning outputs such as teaching resources. The PI worked with four student Research Assistants (RAs) who together operated as a distributed team responsible for achieving shared goals in keeping with Cook-Sather et al.’s (2014) SaP vision. Shared goals included joint creation of project videos and collaboration on social media for the project. Building open, professional digital presence for all team members was core to the open

pedagogy element of the partnership. Each RA also had independent roles and responsibilities, outlined below (Table 1).

Table 1. Research assistants' roles and responsibilities

RESEARCH ASSISTANTS	ROLES
Anthony Pisciueneri	Research consultant and coordinator for faculty videos
Olivia Paty	Led video production and editing for the project
Alyssa Tieu	Established professional development opportunities for the project within local schools and boards
Stephanie Johnston	Researched and scripted student videos and led academic writing for the project

Campbell (2019) discusses the importance of online contribution for both professors and students and posits that contributing work to a public resource is a benefit for all parties involved. The creation of open resources for authentic audiences has enabled the RAs in this project to take on visible positions of authority and expertise on the open web and in academic and K-12 settings in which they would otherwise seldom be positioned as experts.

The start (May)

In May 2019, three students who had expressed interest in the project were contracted as research assistants. The concept of “scaffolded collaboration” served as an emergent path to enact the open pedagogy principles of autonomy and interdependence, freedom and responsibility, and democracy and participation. The PI made visible the goals that the grants committed the team to, then tasks were divided by role. Team members worked collaboratively and iteratively towards outputs. Feedback from the PI and peers was part of every stage of development.

Stage 1 was to set parameters for the types of platforms the project would cover. The goal was to give a teacher-to-teacher overview of tools for other educators, so we chose to limit our analyses to tools and platforms that would be openly available and wouldn't require institutional buy-in. The PI and one RA researched and co-wrote the first script. We filmed and edited quickly so as to be able to present at a teaching and learning conference mid-month.

The presentation was well-received; however, the process of showcasing the first video led us to realize that we needed core structural elements that would appear in each video. The team spent the remainder of May designing transitions, end cards, and other visual elements for the videos. Social media channels for the project were also established, with team members sharing updates and photos throughout the project.

Distributed communications (June-July)

In June and July, we researched and scripted five more videos and filmed intensively over three dates. All members of the team were in different locations, so most communication was done online through Slack, Skype, or email. Each week, an overview update email was sent out by each member of the team to say what they had accomplished on the project and what they needed from others.

This distributed digital collaboration of the project was a learning experience for all members of the team. Everyone was learning how to work together, keep track of multiple responsibilities, communicate in a timely manner, and build a sense of team, all from separate locations.

By the end of July, a total of six videos had been filmed for the project, with two edited and another scripted, and the site had been designed and set up. Project writing was also embarked upon, and foundations were laid for faculty video contributions and the service learning course.

Bringing it back together (August)

During August, the final two student-led videos were filmed, and two completed videos were launched on YouTube and Twitter. The PI spent August designing and preparing for September service learning classes based on The Open Page. All team members returned to the same city and welcomed a new RA to the project to coordinate faculty engagement and write scripts for faculty contributions to the video collection. The first eight videos of the project—covering ten platforms—had been hosted by student RAs, but the second stage of the project included faculty development and additional videos hosted by Education faculty. The videos are showcased together, with faculty contributions equal to those of students.

Launch of phase 1 (September-November)

Throughout the fall, three key elements of the project were initiated or completed, and three RAs wrapped up their collaboration with the project. An additional grant was secured to keep the video RA on through the winter to complete editing.

The faculty development element of the project was a success. Eight Faculty of Education staff—including six tenured or tenure-track faculty, a sessional instructor, and an academic staff member—expressed an interest in contributing. Five faculty videos were filmed in late October and November.

The team also had success with the first K-12 professional learning element of the project. The team delivered well-received professional development (PD) sessions at two local high schools. Two different PD sessions were presented to teachers one focused on the differentiation possibilities of digital tools for science and math teachers, the other directed more towards language and social studies. Many educators expressed an interest in the project.

The PI's service learning classes were designed to take the tool parade further by having two classes of pre-service teachers create Open Page podcasts on the same model as the videos. The videos were used as a textbook to teach analysis of core elements of the project, including classroom uses, data implications, and differentiated possibilities of specific tools. The RAs presented to the service learning students, and made a video for them on scripting for the

web. The service learning students then chose tools of their own to analyze, and worked in teams to create 13-20 minute podcasts for The Open Page. All four RAs served as course mentors for the first term of the course, giving feedback on reflections and draft podcast scripts. The service learning course deepened the SaP element of the partnership, enabling the RAs to serve as mentors and decision-makers within their existing faculty, and offering another learning experience in interdependent effort towards a shared goal.

2020 phases

The project team filmed 13 videos total and scripted one other for potential future iterations. The university provided studio support to podcast teams from the service learning courses, who recorded in January. The service learning students also created pedagogical resources and lesson plans to share openly on the site and prepared public outreach sessions intended to be presented to teachers and parents in the local community during Year 2 of the course. The COVID-19 pandemic has interfered with that plan, at least at time of press, but in the context of increased interest in online teaching tools, both the videos and podcasts have circulated beyond the project's original goals. In fact, one RA-led video went moderately viral during the pandemic, and has been viewed more than 12,000 times.

CHALLENGES

The project has been a genuine success, but from concept to product it has also been a learning experience for everyone involved. The PI and RAs all report benefiting from the partnership, both in terms of learning and skills development, and in meta-learning that may serve our respective future students.

One challenge was learning how to communicate effectively with an open public audience. The idea of scaffolded collaboration was an important pathway for supporting student voice, but also one that demanded care. Cook-Sather's (2007) caution about student voice not being lauded at face value but approached with a critical mindfulness to power relations and differential risk, which is particularly important in open pedagogy and practice, where students' work is cultivated toward public circulation with real-world consequences and impact. The goal of the scaffolded partnership within The Open Page was to ensure that student voices and decision-making were approached as supported learning curves within complex real-world professional environments.

This challenge of communicating with authentic audiences has not been without setbacks. RAs had to create engaging scripts that covered extensive material in a short time, while digging deeply into data implications and differentiated learning possibilities. One company contacted the team after the release of our video about their platform, noting that our interpretation of their data policies had been incorrect. That script had received the least oversight because some sections hadn't been drafted in time for the PI to review before filming. Edits had to be made to an already released video to correct our error. However, this experience served as an important cautionary tale in the RAs' mentoring of the service learning students, and provided a reminder that open, authentic communications come with profound responsibilities.

Learning to give and take critique and feedback in a primarily written environment can also be challenging. As future teachers, however, the RAs will likely engage in a great deal of written formative feedback over the course of their careers, so the capacity to engage professionally in this manner will hopefully be a lasting legacy of the project. The PI tried to model professional communications and appreciation for people's work, even when asking for another iteration or correcting an approach. RA Alyssa Tieu noted in her project reflection that feedback contributed to the team's successful production of quality web content:

Feedback was one of the most important aspects of the project. The feedback that I received along the way has helped me reflect and make adjustments moving forward. I really liked how the feedback that was given was always positive in the sense that there was always a "highlight" of strength acknowledgement, followed by some potential pointers for improvement. The structure of the feedback was highly impactful because it was easy to see what I could improve on and what to continue doing.

Another challenge came from working across distributed spaces. Throughout the project, we had team members in different cities, countries, and time zones. Each member had other responsibilities—jobs and classes—that hindered meeting availability. One RA was abroad through a large part of the summer, thus even text messages couldn't be relied on for communications. Weekly emails, Slack, and planning well in advance for our meetings were the tools we tried to deploy to help the team feel close. Technology can fail, however, and plans can change; sometimes video wouldn't work, sound wouldn't work, or someone got called into another job.

The RA team responded with flexibility and learned how to troubleshoot and take responsibility for both their own aspects of the project and gaps that emerged. The distributed nature of the team's work may have ultimately increased the open pedagogy aspect of the partnership, because it minimized the PI's capacity to serve as a dominant point of coordination. It instead encouraged independent, autonomous, and participatory decision-making among the student team, creating conditions for a genuine Students-as-Partners experience.

Overall, the partnership has been a learning experience that all team members have found value in. The project features all partners' names and thus builds digital professional presence for the RAs. It also served to build affinity spaces (Bergin, 2018) among the team, to the extent that the Slack channel served as a social space for learning together.

The scaffolded collaboration approach encouraged each team member to take ownership of particular elements of the project. Time-managing individual work in order to enable others to succeed was imperative. RA Olivia Paty noted that the team became adept at recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses and at asking other team members for what they needed:

Make sure that everyone has a voice and is a part of the creation process but have someone in-charge of managing each task. This person is not responsible

for completing everything but they should be the “nudge” button to make sure the minds of the group are being heard and staying on task/track.

IMPACT & LEARNING

The foundational tensions of open pedagogy (Paquette, 1979) were central to the intensive and productive student-faculty partnership of The Open Page: autonomy and interdependence, freedom and responsibility, and democracy and participation. With the project being so distributed, all team members had to collaborate in ways and at a level that was new and powerful. The autonomy/interdependence tension offered meaningful interpersonal learning. RA Anthony Pisciuoneri reflected on how team differences supported his growth during the project:

Personally, my previous conceptions about group work and collaboration have been changed throughout this project. I find it enjoyable to work with individuals who are not like-minded, as they provide me with the opportunity for personal growth and development.

The freedom/responsibility tension in open pedagogy also stood out for student partners, particularly in the university setting where even pre-service teachers are seldom offered authority or decision-making opportunity. In her project reflection, RA Stephanie Johnston asserted how both freedom and responsibility were more authentic than in many student projects:

Usually there are many constraints on the freedom allowed on projects within a university setting. In the project all of us were allowed freedom within our assigned tasks, yet we were responsible for getting tasks done by a certain date. Within our freedom, we were still held to the standards of the project.

The final tension in open pedagogy that The Open Page made visible in faculty-student partnerships was that of democracy/participation. The student RAs contributed to decision-making throughout the project, and noted that they felt heard. They enthusiastically participated in academic conferences and led professional development about the project. These elements of the partnership were designed to promote the project, enable the RAs to take on professional roles, and share their expertise in front of authentic audiences, while also learning from and with experienced mentors. This kind of full participation is not always part of a B.Ed program, but aligns with the tenets of open pedagogy and Students as Partners.

CONCLUSIONS

The original goal of The Open Page was to support the technology learning curve shared by professors, K-12 educators, and B.Ed students, with pre-service teachers as central, decision-making leaders and video creators. In the end, the experience of partnership and collaboration was perhaps an end in itself.

The principles of open pedagogy guided the project through an intentional process of scaffolded collaboration and feedback. RA roles in the project were marked by significant independence and decision-making, balanced by intensive feedback and interdependence of outputs. RA Stephanie Johnston noted that the relationships and roles were different from the RAs' prior experiences with faculty or work responsibilities, and both the professional learning and partnership elements were valuable.

We didn't have previous experience of being student partners. In past experiences we, as students, were talked at rather than talked with. In this project we all gained confidence communicating with Dr. Stewart in a way that we hadn't with other professors, where we weren't allowed to be partners to the same degree.

Students produced and presented PD sessions for real audiences of educators and faculty. The process developed their expertise and confidence as peer professionals within their Faculty of Education and in the local K-12 teaching community. The PI reflected on the opportunity to build collaborative relationships with the students, and on working with them in partnership:

All the RAs are exceptional students: the kind we all agree will be exceptional teachers someday. One of the goals of this project was to create a collaborative environment where that "someday" got to be "now"—where they had opportunities to do meaningful, authentic public work that showcased their strengths and abilities, while still learning professional and digital literacies through intensive feedback and iteration.

Ultimately, the student partners found the project's distributed, online communication a beneficial learning experience that deepened their digital literacies perhaps even more than the actual video creation. The opportunity to learn and produce in partnership with faculty, in agential leadership roles within the program they are still studying in, has proven to be a powerful shared knowledge-creation activity. The Open Page was a great experiment in online communication, partnership, and shared learning curves. Our hope is that it will serve as a foundation for future endeavours in our faculty, and as an open model for Students as Partners.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Stephanie Johnston worked on this project as an undergraduate student during her second year of her Bachelor of Education from 2019-2020. Stephanie contributed the scripts and research for the student-performed videos along with being the lead student for academic writing. Stephanie is currently preparing to graduate and further share her knowledge of technology usage in the classroom.

Bonnie Stewart is assistant professor of online pedagogy and workplace learning at the University of Windsor. Bonnie was an early MOOC researcher and ethnographer of Twitter as an

academic environment. Her current research interests include what it means to know, to learn, and to be a citizen in our current information ecosystem.

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