

Open Educational Practices Advocacy: The Instructional Designer Experience

Plaidoyer pour les pratiques éducatives ouvertes : l'expérience du concepteur pédagogique

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Abstract

Instructional designers are in a unique position to provide leadership and support for advancement of new technologies and practices. Yet a search of literature reveals a paucity of research on current and potential roles specifically focused on instructional designers in relation to incorporating and advocating for open educational practices at their higher education institutions. Against the background of emerging open educational practices, a survey and interviews were conducted with instructional design professionals to establish, from their experience and practice, their roles and potential for advocacy of open educational practices (OEP) including open educational resources (OER). Among the results of the analysis, it was found that while instructional designers have a strong awareness of, and desire to advocate for, OEP in their institutions, their ability to move forward was limited by perceived barriers such as lack of relevant mandates and professional workload recognition, policy development and funding, awareness, and leadership support. In addition, there were gaps identified between what they most valued about OEP, such as implementing innovative pedagogies, and what they could actually initiate and advocate for in practice (i.e., adopt and support OER). They pointed to a lack of formal learning opportunities around OEP and expressed that their main sources of learning and support were of an informal nature, acquired through their networks and collaborations with peers.

Résumé

Les concepteurs pédagogiques sont dans une position unique pour fournir un leadership et un soutien pour l'avancement des nouvelles technologies et pratiques. Pourtant, une recherche documentaire révèle un manque de recherche sur les rôles actuels et potentiels spécifiquement axés sur les concepteurs pédagogiques en ce qui concerne l'intégration et la promotion de pratiques éducatives ouvertes dans leurs établissements d'enseignement supérieur. Dans le contexte des

nouvelles pratiques éducatives ouvertes, une enquête et des entretiens ont été menés avec des professionnels de la conception pédagogique pour établir, à partir de leur expérience et de leur pratique, leurs rôles et leur potentiel de défense des pratiques éducatives ouvertes (OEP), y compris les ressources éducatives ouvertes (OER). Parmi les résultats de l'analyse, il a été constaté que, bien que les concepteurs pédagogiques soient fortement conscients et désireux de défendre l'OEP dans leurs établissements, leur capacité à aller de l'avant était limitée par des obstacles perçus tels que le manque de mandats pertinents et la reconnaissance de la charge de travail professionnelle, élaboration de politiques et financement, sensibilisation et soutien au leadership. De plus, des écarts ont été identifiés entre ce qu'ils apprécient le plus au sujet de l'OEP, comme la mise en œuvre de pédagogies innovantes, et ce qu'ils pourraient réellement initier et défendre en pratique (adopter et soutenir les REL). Ils ont souligné le manque d'opportunités formelles d'apprentissage autour de l'OEP et ont déclaré que leurs principales sources d'apprentissage et de soutien étaient de nature informelle, acquises par le biais de leurs réseaux et collaborations avec des pairs.

Open Educational Practices Advocacy: The Instructional Designer Experience

While research into open educational practices has increased substantially over the past decade (e.g., Cronin, 2017; Ehlers, 2011; Nascimbeni, Burgos, Campbell & Tabacco, 2018; Weller, 2013; Weller, M., Jordan, K., DeVries, I., & Rolfe, V. 2018), adoption of open educational practices (OEP) including open educational resources (OER) more widely across the institution remains complex. For instance, challenges found in the literature include finding faculty able and willing to adopt OEPs (Childs, Axe, Veletsianos, & Webster, 2020), problems of discoverability and available support and time (Jhangiani, Pitt, Hendricks, Key, & Lalonde 2016), lack of supportive institutional cultures and strategies (Murphy, 2013), and the “diverse and often contested nature” (Cronin, 2020, p. 3) of the term “open educational practices” itself. In the face of these and other potential challenges, a search of the literature reveals a paucity of research focused specifically on instructional designers and their potential roles in the adoption and implementation of OEP in higher education. We note that the roles associated with instructional design may be undertaken by some who do not share that title, a consideration that is taken into account in our study. Thus, the term “instructional designer” here includes others undertaking dedicated instructional design-related roles such as educational developers, learning technologists, faculty and administrators who engage in pedagogical design and development processes with the potential to influence teaching practice and advocate for increased use of OEP and OER in particular.

Campbell and Schwier (2014) note that “instructional designers and other influential contributors involved in the design and development of distributed learning programs must challenge and push boundaries of traditional practices if higher education is to maintain its relevance to students and society” (p. 370). As an important factor in adoption of OEP among faculty, Nascimbeni, Burgos, Campbell and Tabacco (2018) point to the “potential to build on the expertise of leading open practitioners to raise the overall capacity of their teaching staff” (p. 513). Ren (2019) notes that instructional designers “often serve as instructional innovators in solving teaching problems... [and] are more likely to become early adopters of new educational technologies and evaluate the usability of innovative resources” (p. 3492). Such opportunities exist at the interpersonal, professional, institutional, and societal levels (Campbell, Schwier & Kenny, 2009; Schwier, Campbell & Kenny, 2004). As described by Hannan (2005), as part of a team of pedagogical influencers learning technologists

have made a major contribution to attempts to improve teaching and learning in HE as both initiators and enablers of innovation. They have been well placed as participant observers to note the shifts in institutional climate—in structures, policies and culture—that have promoted or restricted such innovation (p. 984).

Our own professional work engages us in advocacy for, and implementation of, OEP including OER in the form of such initiatives as open textbook creation and adoption, use of open web platforms and tools, open admission to courses and programs, designing toward open pedagogies, and open access publishing. We are therefore keenly interested in the actual and potential roles of instructional designers in advocating for, and implementing, OEP.

This interest leads to the questions, what is the role of instructional designers in the implementation of OEP and what potential influence do they have in OEP adoption at the institutional level? A number of instructional designers were surveyed and interviewed in search of answers to these and other questions.

Literature Review

The study began with a review of the literature to gain a sense of the scope of the term “open educational practices.” While there is an abundance of literature on the topic, there remain variations as well as some disagreement in the field on the meaning (Nascimbeni & Burgos, 2016). For example, Conole and Ehlers (2010) focus mainly on uses of content in the form of open educational resources: “Open Educational Practices (OEP) are a set of activities and support around the creation, use and repurposing of Open Educational Resource” (p. 1). Hogan, Carlson, and Kirk (2015) identify specific learner capabilities such as self-directed and learning skills enhanced by OEP. Reference is also made to emerging pedagogical models that display such attributes as “openness, connectedness, trust, and innovation” (Hegarty, 2015, p. 3) in educational practice. Cronin (2017) identifies “collaborative practices that include the creation, use, and reuse of OER, as well as pedagogical practices employing participatory technologies and social networks for interaction, peer-learning, knowledge creation, and empowerment of learners” (p. 4). Looking toward the future, Downes (2019) foresees that, for instructional designers, OER “will no longer facilitate learning by means of content transmission, but rather by constituting parts of, and working within, distributed cooperative networks, supporting the student experience as they become fluent in new challenges and new technologies” (Concluding Remarks section, para 2). Among these descriptions we find a general focus on how OEP, including OER, can transform teaching and learning practices.

Discourses around the development and use of OER and the role of OEP also extend beyond pedagogical innovation and learner empowerment to institutional and societal transformation. Examples of such transformations include a cultural shift from individually owned resources to a commons (Piedra, Chicaiza, López, Tovar, & Martínez, 2009), an ability to work across organizational boundaries in new ways (Beetham, Falconer, McGill, & Littlejohn, 2012), and a counter to knowledge and ideas as “product to be bought and sold in a capitalist market economy” (Attwell & Pumilia, 2007, p. S217). More recently, Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter (2018) ask how the use of OER and OEP, particularly in the global south, can move from an ameliorative approach, focused on lowering costs, both in development and directly to students/educators, to a transformative strategy, where it helps redefine institutional structures and reduces social inequities. They propose a framework to consider how OER adoption and

enactments of OEP can respond to “economic inequalities, cultural inequities and political exclusions in education” (p. 204). In a review of recent open education discourses (2002-2017), Lambert (2018) argues that since the 2002 UNESCO OER Declaration which focused on access for excluded learners, the importance of a social justice perspective was lost to what has been labelled “openness determinism,” the idea that somehow openness will democratize education in and of itself. Lambert also argues that if we want to consider how open education “can begin to shift educational inequality” (p. 240) we need to consider social justice principles to achieve more equitable educational outcomes. In both recent papers, practitioners and educators are challenged to consider open educational practices within a broader framework, to critically interrogate not only how resources are developed, but also how they can be developed to support learners from a variety of educational, social, and economic backgrounds.

Within this setting, instructional designers have a wide array of innovations to explore, facilitate, and promote among faculty and administrators at both big and small scales (Weller, 2010), opportunities which instructional designers are uniquely situated to advance (McGriff, 2001). The adoption of OEP demands changes to teaching and learning, involving knowledge of, and skills in, adopting and adapting OER, developing networked learning strategies with a focus on the commons, creating learner-empowering learning environments, and considering implications for reducing social inequities and improving access and inclusion along with other such changes to practice. Instructional designers who wish to explore and implement such OEP need an understanding not only of such practices, but also of how to promote and support such changes more broadly in the work and institutional setting. Such changes must include the idea of instructional designers who “contribute to positive social change through their design work and by engaging in social relationships and communications with clients who require their services” (Yusop & Correia, 2012, p. 80). Inouye, Merrill and Swan (2005) describes this approach to change as having instructional designers

doing more than just making materials and instruction. The designer is attempting to apply practical wisdom to create an ethically founded and socially responsible experience. It is ethically founded because its fundamental purpose is to help learners by providing learning resources in an optimally helpful way. It is socially responsible because it places an expectation on the designer to provide such valuable content that the learner would want to share it with others. (p. 19)

As described by Schwier, Campbell and Kenney (2007),

In addition to the important role instructional designers play in the design and development of instructional products and programs, they also act in communities of practice as agents in changing the way traditional colleges and universities implement their missions. Designers work directly with faculty and clients to help them think more critically about the needs of all learners, issues of access, social and cultural implications of information technologies, alternative learning environments (e.g., workplace learning), and related policy development. As such, through reflexive practice, interpersonal agency and critical practice they are important participants in shaping interpersonal, institutional and societal agendas for change. (2006, p. 2)

Given the consolidation and growth of OEP and the potential role of instructional designers in this development both individually and in communities of practice (Sharif & Cho, 2015), we initiated this study to learn more about instructional designer roles from a change agency (Schwier

et al., 2004) perspective, in order to gain a better understanding of current instructional designer experiences related to OEP and the ability of instructional design to influence uptake and implementation. Specifically, the research focus was to ascertain the strategies and practices used by instructional designers in higher education to advocate for, and implement OEP, as well as the barriers encountered.

Approach and Methods

Surveys and interviews were used to collect data for this study. Before designing the questions, it was necessary to provide participants with a working definition of open educational practices.

Defining OEP

Given the wide scope and implications of OEP, it became necessary for this study to shape a definition that broadly fits the instructional design context, which in the authors' setting involves advocacy beyond the traditional scope of the everyday work of instructional design. Therefore, for study participants the term "open educational practices" was defined as "creation and/or use of open educational resources; adoption of open pedagogies; use of open source and/or free software and tools; and/or open sharing of scholarly practice and knowledge with others." This definition was employed to focus the scope of the study, particularly in relation to potential policy impacts requiring influence or institutional change management on the part of instructional designers in favour of such practices.

Research Method

Both the literature and our own experiences in instructional design, and more broadly in open education practices, helped to structure and guide the research questions and design. Participants were recruited from those working in instructional design, as defined earlier. Given the diversity of instructional design roles in the field (Bodily, Leary, & West, 2019), a fairly broad net was cast while instructional design remained at the core of the inclusion criteria. Thus, participation was invited from respondents who identified as an instructional designer or under a title such as educational technologist, or faculty developer or administrator working directly and full-time within the field of instructional design in a post-secondary institution. Messages of invitation were broadcast through social media (e.g., Twitter and Facebook), professional societies or open-focused organizations (e.g., CNIE, ETUG, OERu), using a snowball sampling method where "researchers ask participants to identify others to become members of the sample" (Creswell, 2012, p. 146). After research ethics approval was obtained, data was collected in two ways: through the anonymous online survey questionnaire and an optional confidential follow-up interview from among a purposively selected sample of respondents who volunteered to participate in this second stage of data gathering.

The survey questionnaire focused on questions related to roles and practices, values, supports, and enabling and inhibiting factors for implementation. Descriptive data were compiled from the combination of questions and entered in an Excel spreadsheet, where statistics and charts were constructed. Content analysis of the open-ended survey questions was conducted using inductive coding (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and analysis of themes (Bazeley, 2013) with the intention of creating and analyzing new categories, concepts, and overall themes.

A total of 43 surveys were completed, with participants coming from a variety of locations, the majority being from Canada and the US, though responses from Australia, South Africa, Germany, and the UK were also received. In the respondent profile, 42% identified their positions as instructional designers while others indicated their roles as teaching faculty, instructional design administrators and other support professionals such as educational technologists, and educational consultants involved full-time in instructional design.

A majority of participants (73%) work in a university setting, with others working in the college sector (7%) or non-profit or other governmentally supported educational organization. From among the survey respondents who indicated willingness to participate, eight were selected for a follow-up interview based on geographical location and type of position to ensure a variety of contexts were represented. After completion of the initial analyses of the survey responses, open-ended questions were developed for the follow-up interviews. The interview questions were based on themes derived from the analysis of anecdotal survey responses and included open-ended questions about personal context and practice, as well as personal and institutional benefit and concerns to consider.

In our analysis of the demographics of the respondents, some were clustered in certain geographical areas. As there are different levels of governmental and institutional supports for OEP across jurisdictions, we felt the need to ensure that the interviews represented a wide array of experiences to further explore the themes identified in the surveys and not skew to the clusters. Therefore a purposeful, criterion sampling method was implemented along with random selection where appropriate. Patton (2002) suggests that purposeful sampling technique can be an effective way of selecting information-rich cases from a limited pool. Participants were listed in random order and then the first on the list from each cluster was chosen, along with all the others who were not part of any cluster. This then ensured that participants represented the most balanced geographic distribution across Canada (different provinces) and internationally possible from among our respondents. This process resulted in interviews with respondents from the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland, along with the US and South Africa.

Results

Survey

In the initial analysis of the survey stage of this study, following the structure of the survey questionnaire and themes identified in the written response, inductive coding process results were divided into four main areas: practices; values and advocacy; influence and uptake; and OEP/OER adoption barriers and enablers. Each of these is now discussed in turn.

Practices. It was of particular interest to learn what practices related to OEP instructional designers were using in their current roles. As highlighted in Figure 1, the different practices reported can be organized into three categories: adoption only (incorporating OER resources/textbooks into courses), creation (creating OER), and integrating/adopting OEP (which includes using open pedagogies, research, and other open practices). Among these categories there appears a pattern of movement where instructional designers are at different stages of their engagement with OEP, with 38% reporting that they are using or advocating for OEP in their practice. This pattern aligns with that outlined by Ehlers and Conole (2010) wherein they

characterize three different stages of OER adoption along a continuum. At the first “island” stage, OER is used, modified and created; at the second “strategy” stage, use of OER becomes relevant at the organizational level and policies/resources being to emerge. At the final stage, which they term “open educational practices,” learning becomes an open process and social practices such as open-peer review, learner generated content, and crossing of institutional boundaries occurs.

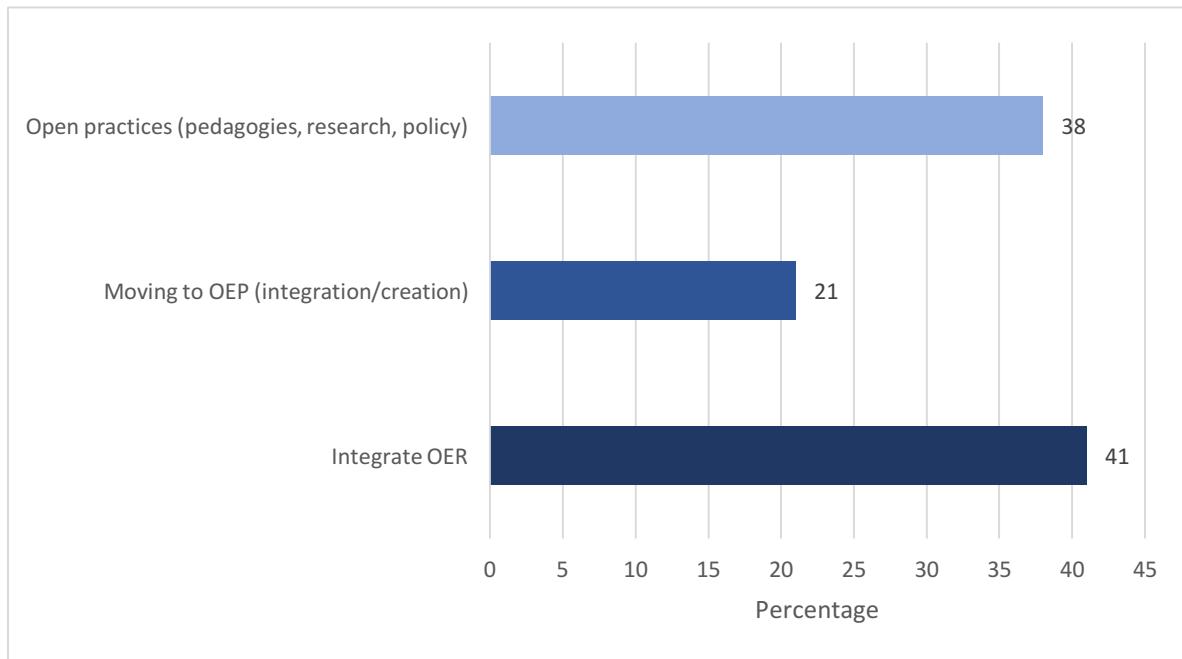


Figure 1. Professional practices used in current roles.

Values and Advocacy. Participants were asked to reflect on what they felt was the most important aspect of OEP in their own *personal practice* as well as what they *valued overall* about OEP. Not surprisingly, what people were able to do in their daily practice may not have always aligned with their stated values. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the most prominent aspect for practice was advocacy and adoption, with participants relating that the impact on not only reducing student costs, but also improvement for student access and outcomes, was particularly important. This focus was seen as less important as a direct value. Only 14% reported that pedagogical innovation was the most important aspect of their practice, but when asked about values (Figure 2), this was much more prominent (27%). One aspect of OEP adoption that was not reported about in relation to practice was a focus on quality, but this was reported as an area of values.

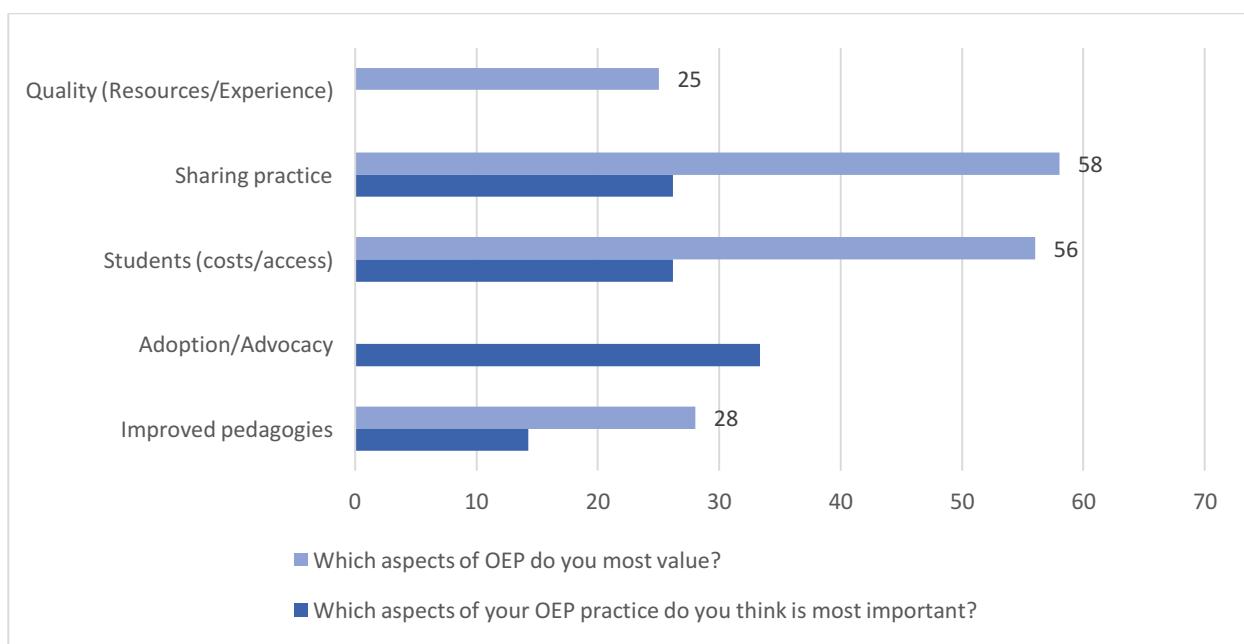


Figure 2. Comparison of the importance of OEP in practice versus what is valued in OEP.

Further, sharing practices was important for both current practice and values, with participants highlighting the importance of building a community through sharing of OEPs and how this would help provide supports, improved knowledge, student success and learning, and more creative pedagogies. As one participant highlighted, “Having resources and practices that are openly shared and discussed contributes to a community of practice, a sense of belonging, and a shared meaning. The principles of flexibility and open access are important steps towards student success and social justice.” Another participant focused on the value of open educational practice on increased learner-driven pedagogy:

I value the capacity for student-driven pedagogy that OEP represents. If we wish to walk-the-walk of supporting learners to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, and strong 21st century societal contributors, then we must shift formal higher education practices to embrace the abundance of information available, and trust in learners to be able to curate, adapt, and share it with the purpose of improving the world.

The focus on sharing practice is significant, as 79% of respondents reported that they learn about OEP through their networks, often external, and only 11% report using any formal approaches. This is contrasted with how participants learn in their field overall, with 56% sharing that they took advantage of formal learning opportunities, such as courses or degree programs.

Influence and Uptake. As shown in Figure 3, 36% of respondents reported they incorporated OER/OEP to a moderate or great extent in their work. At the same time, 48% felt that they had at least a moderate influence on uptake or adoption in their organization. One of the most widely reported reasons for a lack of higher levels of influence was that many of the respondents felt that they could only provide advice (over 50%) and that ultimately the final decision was up to a faculty member. As reported in other studies, many faculty may still be unaware of OER, question the quality, or prefer publisher resources and the accompanying ancillary supports

(Annand & Jensen, 2017). They also felt that their ability to influence choice/adoption was limited by lack of support through institutional resources/funding or direct support or direction from leadership. Over 37% of respondents indicated that they had little or no support in their role, and of those that did have support, only 18% came directly from the institution. In addition, many respondents felt that there was a perception of the lack of availability of OER along with a questioning of the quality of the OERs available.

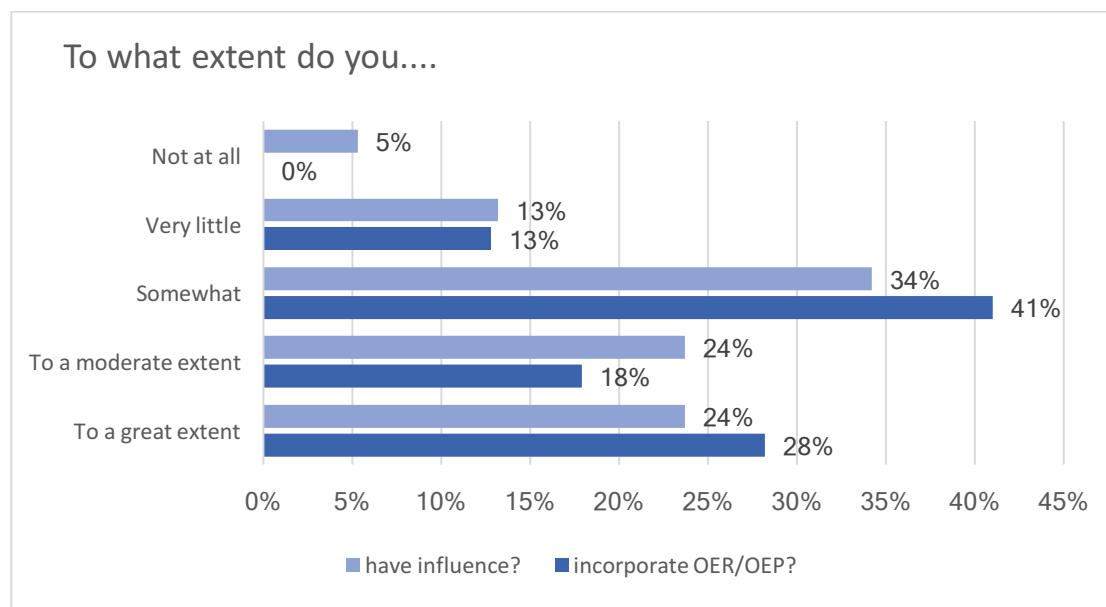


Figure 3. Levels of influence over, and incorporation of, OER/OEP.

As indicated above, many respondents further their learning through networks, and it appears that many are working alone in their advocacy role. Though OEP impacts their own work, many report that they find little impact overall at the institutional level.

Barriers and Enablers. Respondents were asked what they felt both inhibited and/or enabled adoption of OER/OEP. As was identified in the previous section, faculty perceptions of quality, resourcing (funding/time), policy/culture, and leadership support were four major areas identified (see Table 1).

Leadership support was one area that participants felt was a crucial factor for enabling OEP, with 50% identifying leadership as being both an enabling and/or inhibiting factor. Particularly as culture and policy shifts are needed to change how OEP are valued within the academy, leadership support for infrastructure, policy development, and funding for special projects was seen as particularly important.

Respondents also felt that overall awareness or lack thereof was an important factor in shifting policies and culture. They felt that many faculty did not understand copyright licensing, feared “giving away” intellectual property, and felt that OER may be substandard in quality. Leadership support for OER initiatives through release time, support for dissemination and adoption of openness into promotion and tenure criteria were seen as ways to help improve awareness and support.

Time and resources were seen as critical components for faculty adoption of OER and integration of OEP, and as one respondent highlighted “the general business of faculty and the required change of practice that it takes to adopt OEP. I think there is an overall malaise in the institution and people feel over-worked. It is therefore difficult to ask them to do more things on their own time.” As reported by Jhangiani et al. (2016), one major barrier to using OER was the lack of “administrative, staff, or departmental support” (p. 20) and training for use is seen as an enabling factor.

Table 1

Enabling/Inhibiting Factors for OER/OEP Adoption/Implementation

Factor	Enabling	Inhibiting
Leadership Support	Support for dissemination/celebrations Direct mandate for OER Infrastructure creation	Lack of awareness No support for time Lack of staff/resources Lack of vision (short-sightedness)
Policy/Culture	Curriculum committees Role definitions Thriving teaching and learning centre Support networks	Little priority on teaching practice Lack of promotion and tenure criteria Lack of awareness Resistance/business as usual Perceived lack of academic freedom/ownership
Quality/Availability	Tools for sharing Library support Institutional repositories	Perception of quality Technical expertise Copyright awareness Publisher materials Adaptability
Funding/Time	Release time for faculty Specially funded projects (journals)	Lack of time/resources to create/adopt Workload expectations

Interviews

The interviews conducted with the selected survey questionnaire respondents provided an opportunity to probe more deeply into the survey responses and invite additional participant insights. The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended in design (Creswell, 2012).

Analysis of the interview responses led us to three main themes in relation to engagement with OEP: enabling of more open pedagogical approaches, changes in ways of working, and development of critical awareness. Each of these themes is now discussed in more detail.

Open Pedagogical Approaches

The issue of open pedagogical approaches arose primarily in response to describing how OEPs influenced the field of learning design over the past decade. While the impact of OEP on learning itself was not included as part of this study, participants described influence of OEP in the teaching and learning space. Participants indicated that the growth and integration of OEPs in their field over the past decade have led to more learner-focused open pedagogies. They related that use of OEPs increased learner agency, enabling participation in creating and editing OER; increased use by educators and students of social networks to collaborate and find resources; and stimulated more development of meaningful and authentic assignments. OEPs, and especially open pedagogies, increasingly extended beyond MOOCs to more formal studies in higher education institutions.

Changed Ways of Working

As reflected in this second theme, respondents reported that OEPs have enabled new ways of working, including changed and more-efficient workflows involving collaboration and sharing in design and development processes. Collaborative practices promoted more ability to assemble smaller pieces rather than adopt larger, integrated resources, more sharing and putting of resources into the commons, and improved creativity in design. Participants included as benefits of growth in OEPs the ability to model experimentation and risk-taking in their practice, by exposing their own work-in-progress to the world and openly documenting their own OEP processes. Increased knowledge and use of open licenses such as Creative Commons was noted by participants, as was a large increase in the amount of available OER including open textbooks over the past number of years. Also, they identified growth in open tools and platforms, with an enabling effect on the use of open practices. This growth has been not only quantitative but also in terms of improved quality. Increasing institutional support for OEPs was reported, including open education strategies and related policies, and various types of senior-level support for OER and related research. Increasingly, cost savings for the use of OEP, especially for students, are being reported. Also noted was a shift from focus on “one best resource” to more flexible and “inspirational” resources that can be easily adapted for multiple different settings and contexts, leading to avoidance of obsolescence and proprietary silos; also described as a transition from “monolithic tools and resources to small pieces loosely joined.” More widely, they saw OEP involvement as providing an opportunity to rethink education in new ways, and the ability to provide local and global public service in their professional role.

Development of Critical Awareness

Finally, participants also reflected on the importance of maintaining a critical awareness of OEPs, rather than adopting a naïve stance of blind advocacy in the increasing adoption, creation, and integration of OER and OEP. Several participants cautioned against the over-selling of OEP, including succumbing to binary views of open and closed as equating to all good or all bad. For instance, apprehensions were shared about students’ privacy, safety, and control of personal data particularly in open online environments, as well as about practices of “open washing” by educational publishing and technology industries whereby marketing strategies are disguised under a thin veil of OEP. Broader challenges of “academic colonialism,” decontextualization of

content and privileging of the English language in the sharing of OER worldwide were identified, along with an emerging awareness of a need to gain a deeper understanding of who may still be included and excluded by OEP. Further concerns were noted about the potential impact of OEP on university employment and perceived savings, and whether they might be used by cost-cutting funders to justify budget and job reductions in higher education rather than passing on the savings to students. Undue focus on OEP as primarily enabling cost savings was seen as having the potential to undermine a larger vision of the social justice and cultural implications of OEP.

Discussion and Recommendations

In this section we discuss the results of our investigation and offer some recommendations for instructional design practice as well as further research. The instructional designers participating in this research show a strong awareness and understanding of OEP, as well as an orientation towards advocacy for OEP. Their advocacy and underlying values are focused mainly on the many perceived benefits of working within OEP communities and networks, in support of more creativity, sharing and collaboration; improved learner access and outcomes; and more generally the social justice implications. However, only 37% of participants reported using OEP (vs. adopting and developing OER), with 27% indicating that pedagogical innovation was what they valued most. Not surprisingly there exist gaps between what participants are able to attain in their practice in relation to OEP and what they would like to achieve. Though they see themselves as occupying an advocacy role, they also indicated that in some cases they had a diminished ability to influence uptake, as they are often in an advisory and not a decision-making role. In addition, participants identified themselves as likely being one lone advocate within an institution, with only 18% reporting institutional supports and others indicating they felt their work had little overall institutional impact. If a move from merely supporting OER adoption (ameliorative) to changing practices and widening access within HE (transformative) is a priority, then it will require additional supports and framework development. Further research into open educational practice may consider how to provide instructional design and allied professionals with the tools to critically interrogate open education resource development and impact of practice within the broader open discourses. As many participants indicated that the majority of their learning opportunities in OEP are informal, through networks and collaboration with peers, how can a shift towards more critical practice and engagement with openness be supported?

Given instructional designers' skillsets, broad networks across institutions, and ability to advise faculty and others on OEP, senior leaders who wish to advance an institutional vision for some or many aspects of OEP – as is increasingly the case – may find providing more support in such areas as infrastructure, policy development and special funding will further advance institutional change in the direction of increased openness. As Keppell (2007) and others have pointed out, instructional design professionals have the capacity to broker change within their institutions. In the big picture, many of the instructional designers who participated in the study see OEP involvement as an opportunity to rethink education, and to provide local and global public service in their professional role. At the same time, they express an awareness that openness has many nuances and implications requiring careful and critical understanding. Research, networks, and ongoing dialogue are necessary to further and deepen institutional understanding of openness and the directions it can take.

Owing to the gap between instructional designers' values about OEP as well as ability to implement them, and what they would like to achieve with OEP, strategies are necessary where possible to shift from only personal advocacy toward gaining support at organizational levels, wherever a receptive ear can be found. This is not to suggest that instructional designers bear the responsibility for a major organizational change, but rather that to the extent they desire to see OEP increasingly incorporated in their institution, they be aware of the possibility and potential advantages a strategic approach can take. Instructional designers are often on various committees across the institution, and OEPs could be placed on the agenda and spoken to in these venues. Finding and collaborating with faculty who support OEP can be of great assistance. Because of the complexity of OEP and its many, continuously evolving and contested meanings, it is likely better to begin with the more intuitively understood benefits of such aspects as OER in general and open textbooks, for example, although appeals to any wording in strategic and academic plans as well as mission statements oriented toward access, innovation, student centredness and other such terms may be appealed to in discussions where relevant. At the same time, it is also important to press for recognition of work in OEPs as part of regular workflows rather than as one-off or unrecognized labour, if they are to become sustainable. Finally, tempering advocacy with awareness and openness about any critiques and concerns that exist with regard to OEPs will help to encourage more informed discourses institution wide.

Several limitations to this study must be identified. As we noted earlier, because the work of instructional design is shared between many other roles, we included respondents who were working in instructional design but who may not have this formal title with the result that some context is required to interpret our results. Our sample size was limited by the reach of the snowball method and our desire to avoid geographical clusters among interviewees. Our questions focused on OEP more broadly, including pedagogical approaches, rather than on specific effects on learning. In contextualizing our findings, we needed to consider that those who responded to the initial invitation would tend to be those already engaged in, or at minimum aware of, OER and OEP, so likely missed perspectives of those who are not part of those larger discourses of openness such as instructional designers working in a larger variety of sectors.

In conclusion, there is much more research to be done to follow up on this study, with a focus on existing and potential roles of instructional designers in advancing OEP in their institutions as well as the impact of instructional design practices incorporating OEP on learning beyond open textbooks. OEPs continue to gain interest and traction in higher education as well as among other sectors, and instructional designers and affiliated professionals with similar or overlapping roles will have a vital role to play as change agents. There exist for instructional designers both operational and strategic opportunities to influence their institutions and evolve their professional roles in the process.

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