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# Can Open Pedagogy Encourage Care? Student Perspectives

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## Abstract

As a response to the increasing commercialization of postsecondary education, educators argue for a practice of care in education. Open pedagogy (OP) seems like an ideal practice where care, trust, and inclusion can be realized. OP is characterized as a democratic and collaborative pedagogical practice, in which students and teachers work to co-create learning and knowledge using openly licensed materials, open platforms, and other open processes. The purposes of this study were, first, to reveal ways students in postsecondary institutions perceive care and, second, to determine how students suggest OP can be used to create an open/caring learning process. A task-oriented focus group method engaged students from four teaching-focused institutions. The students created open cases on social issues for class discussion and reflected on care and OP processes in postsecondary settings. Using four elements of the ethics of care—attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and trustworthiness—as conceptual categories, the study examined students' experience of care and care in OP using affective coding and thematic analysis. The results showed that through OP, with teacher support and explicitly designed practices of care, students can assert their agency, have quintessential roles in creating and participating in highly relevant curriculum and importantly, care about others, and be cared for. OP is a process able to involve a diverse population of students and embody care as an all-encompassing practice.

*Keywords:* open pedagogy, ethics of care, inclusion, student perspectives

## Introduction

Educators have warned against the increasingly commercialized, transactional relationships created in postsecondary institutions: with students as individual customers and teachers as providers of credentials according to market forces (Molesworth et al., 2009; Tomlinson, 2016). Countering these transactional relationships between teachers and students, educators have argued for a practice of care in education. Teachers and students need to develop trusting relationships with each other (Anderson et al., 2020; Velasquez et al., 2013) and create inclusive classrooms for everyone (Bovill et al., 2016; Faulkner et al., 2020).

Open pedagogy (OP) is an educational practice in which care, trust, and inclusion can be realized and through which students are intended to be thriving, collaborative learners creating knowledge together. OP has long associations with constructivist and critical approaches (DeRosa and Jhangiani, n.d.). Morgan (2016) traces an early iteration to Paquette (1979), who outlines three foundational values of OP: autonomy and interdependence, freedom and responsibility, and democracy and participation. These values resurface in more recent OP approaches which DeRosa and Jhangiani (n.d.) emphasize are committed to open access, learner agency and learning processes that aim to involve students in helping shape the “public commons of which they are a part” (para. 13). OP can be seen to be democratic, collaboratively involving students and teachers in knowledge co-creation that can then be shared back to the community through openly licensing materials, using open platforms and open processes. According to DeRosa and Robison (2017), in their examples of OP, teachers would support a diverse population of students to create open educational resources (OER) that can represent their own experiences and contexts. DeRosa and Robison (2017) give examples of OP such as class co-created “textbooks” or syllabi and “open” assignments where students edit Wikipedia pages or create videos of course content to share on social media.

By its nature, OP is an ideal place to enact attentive, responsible, competent, trust-building care, as it has been defined by ethicists such as Noddings (2013), Held (2006), and Tronto (2013). OP embodies care by encouraging inclusion of underrepresented peoples (Robertson, 2020) and student agency (Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Werth & Williams, 2021) and by facilitating the creation of curriculum and assignments that contribute to social goals (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018).

Care is relational. Teachers may believe that care is shown by facilitating student agency and encouraging their involvement in creating curriculum. Not enough is known about how students perceive this care or how an open pedagogical design can help to foster sustained care in teacher-student relations in education. These are important investigations. The two purposes of this research are, first, to reveal ways that students in postsecondary institutions perceive care and, second, to determine how students suggest OP can be used to create an open/caring learning process. Using cross-institutional focus groups and thematic analysis, this qualitative study explores the following research question:

- How and in what ways does the process of open pedagogy allow for care to be enacted in teacher-student relations in postsecondary institutions?

## Literature Review

### Ethics of Care

This research investigates student perspectives on care using the philosophy of an “ethics of care” (Barnes et al., 2015; Held, 2006; Noddings, 2012, 2013; Tronto, 2017). Instead of using traditional ethics where humans are considered autonomous decision-making individuals, care ethicists argue for a description of humans as embedded and needing relationships (Barnes et al., 2015; Held, 2006; Noddings, 2012, 2013; Tronto, 2017). An ethics of care has the following elements (behaviours): attentiveness, responsibility, competence, trust, and responsiveness (Noddings, 2012, 2013; Tronto, 2013). An attentive carer is mindful and receptive; they take responsibility for meeting needs, and they competently cultivate knowledge to meet an array of expressed needs, thereby building trust (Nodding, 2012; 2013). Sometimes responsiveness to care is not possible; the cared for may be vulnerable or unknown to the carer (Held, 2006; Tronto, 2013). Care ethicists also argue that care is central to democratic society (Held, 2006; Tronto, 2013, 2017), including that care ethics should respond to the “distance and difference” that race brings to care in an unequal world (Parvati, 2019).

The “ethics of care” have been operationalized in education. Educators Sinkinson & McLure (n.d.; 2021) created a framework for reflection based on Noddings’ (2012, 2013) and Tronto’s (2013, 2017) elements of care as above. For example, Sinkinson and McLure (n.d.) show how teachers, when creating OER with students, can enact “attentiveness” by reflecting on “How might you actively listen and make visible attentive enactments of your listening?” (section 2). However, operationalizing the ethics of care in education is not always uncomplicated. Lansdown (2021) asserts that an ethics of care practice must mean being patient and letting ideas *emerge* from dialogue in trusting relationships between students and teachers. Walker & Gleaves (2016) observe that teachers talk about their practices in terms of trust and attentiveness and that they centre relationships with students; however, these teachers reported that emotional boundaries with students become muddled. Waghid (2018) controversially argues that in classrooms, intentional dialogue, debate, and even dissonance should be considered acts of caring.

### The Commercialization of Postsecondary Education and Pedagogical Care

Educators have expressed concern that students are increasingly considered as customers and postsecondary education as a commercial business answering to market demands (Lolich & Lynch, 2016; Molesworth et al., 2009; Tomlinson, 2016; Wilkinson, 2020). The commercialization of postsecondary education encourages heightened individualism and undermines pedagogical relationships between teachers and students. This commercialization devalues human connections, exploratory learning, and the transformation of students into critical thinkers, collaborative learners, and caring people (Carey, 2013; Lolich, & Lynch, 2016; Molesworth et al., 2009; Tomlinson, 2016; Wilkinson, 2020).

Despite the commercialization of postsecondary education or because of it, educators argue for a practice of pedagogical care. Reviews of research confirm teachers’ exemplifiers of care: showing empathy, giving praise, having high expectations of work, and showing concern for students’ personal lives (Velasquez et al., 2013). The student-teacher relationship should be one of care and trust (Anderson et al., 2020; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). Teachers should be vulnerable, real people to create trust (Frizelle, 2020; Hardwick, 2021).

Beyond inclusive relationships between students and teachers, students want their ideas and experiences to be an influential part of co-created curriculum (Bovill et al., 2016; Cook-Sather, 2015; Faulkner et al., 2020; Maultsaid, 2022; Wymer & Fulford, 2019). Similar to care ethicists who argue that care is central to democratic society (Held, 2006; Tronto, 2013, 2017), educators and researchers assert that practices of care and inclusion should be underpinned by recognition of systemic inequalities that may challenge students and teachers' practices of care (Mariskind, 2014; Parvati, 2019).

## **Open Educational Practice and Open Pedagogy**

Open educational practices can take place in live or online classes or as multi-site projects and can include multiple elements of teaching and learning, including participatory and critical pedagogies, open librarianship, open science, the use of open-licensing and open technologies, the use and/or creation of OER and a focus on collaboration and representation of multiple perspectives (Cronin, 2017; Koseoglu & Bozkurt, 2018). Hegarty (2015) describes OP as having several attributes, among them that it develops trust and openness in working with other people, encourages free sharing of ideas, facilitates learner contributions to OER, and contributes to a practice of peer review. With the focus of OP on the co-creation of knowledge and empowerment of students to help shape their education and communities, proponents contend that open educational practices and OP in particular can help realize social justice goals in the world (Bali et al, 2020; DeRosa & Jhangiani, n.d.; Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Lambert, 2018).

## **Student Perspectives on Open Pedagogy**

Empirical research on open educational practices with students has historically focused on the cost-savings of free, open textbooks and on the learning outcomes of students; these outcomes were comparable whether OER or commercial textbooks were used (Clinton-Lisell, 2018; Hilton III et al., 2016; Jhangiani et al., 2018). More recently, and encouragingly, given the commercialization of postsecondary education, studies have considered student perceptions of their participation in OP and of using OER. Students have valued their greater sense of self and agency (Axe et al., 2020; Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Werth & Williams, 2021) and believed that their skills at collaboration are improved (Ashman, 2021). Students believe their learning in OP processes is relevant and meaningful (Baran & AlZoubi 2020; Hilton III et al., 2019). Finally, students perceive faculty who are involved in OP as kind teachers (Vojtech & Grissett, 2017).

Students are often willing to contribute to public knowledge and to the learning community (Clinton-Lisell, 2021; Werth & Williams, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). However, students have expressed concerns about OP: that is, about whether their material is accurate (Hilton III et al., 2019) and of high quality (Hendricks, 2021). Some studies reveal that students are concerned about having enough skills to navigate open technologies (Harrison, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020) or about protecting their digital privacy if they publish their names (Harrison, 2021). Given these concerns, OP appears as a sometimes-challenging process for students.

## **Care in Open Pedagogy**

As described in the literature above, the theory and practice of OP appear to discourage treating students as individualistic customers and instead encourage treating them as respected, collaborative learners. With its emphasis on facilitating student agency and encouraging their involvement in creating curriculum, OP appears to be a practice that enacts care as described in the literature cited above. To research how the

emerging educational practices of OP might enact care, we conceptually mapped OP qualities to understand how those qualities might be similar to qualities of the ethics of care (which are a description of human behaviours in general). We used the elements of the ethics of care—attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and trustworthiness—as our organizing categories for analysis to investigate how students describe care and OP. We posited that we would see OP demonstrate care in many ways. Through research on students’ perspectives, we would be able to confirm that OP is, in truth, an actualization and demonstration of the ethics of care (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Ethics of Care Actualized in Open Pedagogy*

Ethics of Care	Open Pedagogy
Relational (we are embedded in and need relations)	Relational/anti-individualistic (projects are collaborative/in context)
Encourages vulnerability (by offering and receiving care)	Encourages vulnerability (by being inclusive and soliciting peer review)
Shows reciprocity	Is reciprocal/sharing
Shows trust	Shows trust in the learning community through modifiable open education resources (OER)
Attentive (mindful)	Considers learners’, teachers’, and learning community’s needs
Responsibly maintains relationships even when not reciprocal	Committed to creating open resources even when it is unknown who is using the shared OER and how
Competent (to provide care)	Relevant: uses OER creators’ experiences and the real world

## Methods

The two purposes of this research are to reveal ways that students in postsecondary perceive care in general and to determine how students suggest OP can be used to help create and sustain an open/caring learning process between teachers and students.

## Research Design

A qualitative research approach, using thematic analysis, was chosen as it allows for the analysis to be informed by themes in existing research and for the examination of multiple meanings interpreted based on researchers' own contexts and subjectivities (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This type of thematic analysis contributes to the conceptual bodies of knowledge about postsecondary students, about the ethics of care, and about OP and does not need to claim to be generalizable to all students (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Because the focus of this research was student perspectives, thematic analysis was a suitable method; as Nowell et al. (2017) emphasize, thematic analysis can be a powerful tool to examine the “perspectives of different research students, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights” (p. 2).

The goals were to investigate student perspectives on care and OP, as well as whether (according to students) the pedagogical *process* embodies and enacts care between students and between teachers and students. Therefore, a task-oriented focus group method (Krueger & Casey, 2015), designed to be inclusive (Bergmark, 2019; Siry & Zawatski, 2011), was chosen so students could discuss issues of OP and care (as in Table 1 above) but also work together in an OP process.

## Participants and Data Collection

Following research ethics board (REB) approval, students were recruited at four British Columbia postsecondary institutions. Institutions which focused on small class sizes, had various programs, and both domestic and international students were chosen so that participants would represent a diverse population. Participation was solicited over three months using email invitations through faculty, student service departments, and open education working groups and by using institutional news sources. Participants self-selected in by completing the consent form and enrolment questionnaire. Multiple institutions were also targeted to reduce assumptions and to facilitate democratic functioning (an OP principle), as the students would likely be unfamiliar with the principal investigator / focus group facilitator and each other.

Students were invited to participate in an OP project, where they would develop ideas (during collaborative focus groups) for an OER case book that would provide realistic class discussion scenarios to explore ethical issues related to discrimination, diversity, and other social issues in the workplace. Recruitment invitations provided a link to the consent forms and an enrolment questionnaire that also collected student data (institution, program, demographics) and asked about interest in potential topics for discussions for the case writing in the focus groups. The questionnaire also helped to determine eligibility, which was intended to include undergraduate students in any program. Twenty-eight students completed the questionnaire, and of these, 16 students further self-selected (via email) to participate in the focus group series in the fall of 2021. Of these 16 participants, 10 self-selected to continue to write for the OER case book project over the spring of 2022.

## Focus Group Process

Students were organized into four smaller groups (of three to five students) and agreed to participate in three 3-hour focus group sessions. Facilitated by the principal investigator and a student assistant, each focus group discussed care in postsecondary institutions and also worked through tasks to begin drafting the OER cases (Maultsaid, 2023). In the questionnaire, students listed preferences on social issues of concern, for example, “Invisible disabilities at work.” In the focus groups, students chose from this list and

started discussing the development of a scenario to be included in future cases. Due to COVID protocols, as well as geographic distributions, Microsoft Teams video conferencing was used to host and record the focus groups. The focus group organization was based on principles of OP that included democratic processes encouraging vulnerable, collaborative, and caring student co-creation of relevant materials based on their experiences and anticipated sharing of free, openly licensed materials. At the end of each session, students responded to a reflection prompt with their thoughts about OP and the focus group process (Maultsaid, 2023). Throughout the spring of 2022, students ( $N = 10$ ) in groups of two to four asynchronously continued to develop the OER (cases) from the focus groups. The student groups had autonomy and worked on the cases on their own schedules, using their own ideas. These students' final reflections were also collected ( $N = 6$ ).

## Data Analysis

### Coding and Thematic Analysis

The questionnaires of focus group participants ( $N = 16$ ), their focus group transcripts, and their reflections were analyzed using qualitative coding and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017; Saldaña, 2021). The team (the co-authors and student assistant) focused on the student experience, using “affective” coding: students' emotions, beliefs, and dilemmas to look for patterns (Saldaña, 2021, Ch. 7, p. 159). We also coded for the focus group process of OP, looking for phenomena such as “developing student agency,” codes inspired by Baran & AlZoubi (2020) and Hegarty (2015).

Keeping the background concepts of ethics of care and OP in mind (Table 1 above), each member of the team completed and documented several rounds of coding. The team discussed and compared codes to establish a rich, nuanced understanding of each other's ideas and established trust in each other's interpretations based on the literature, the data, and researchers' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). Each member consolidated their analysis into a codebook. See codebook examples in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Codebook Examples*

Focus Group Context	Participant Speech	
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Top Code (Care or Open pedagogy))</li> <li>2. Code for Role</li> <li>3. Affective Code</li> </ol>
What does care look like to a student?	<i>"I found it really caring of an instructor who adapted their regular syllabus [by] keeping in mind that we were all stressed out and overwhelmed..."</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Care</li> <li>2. Teacher</li> <li>3. Aware of students</li> </ol>
How is creating materials together showing care?	<i>"...just really making sure you're not jumping to any conclusions or rash judgments about what they're sharing or saying and just really having in this case, that mutual respect for one another."</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open pedagogy</li> <li>2. Student</li> <li>3. Mutual respect / No judgement</li> </ol>

The researchers then organized codes under four sub-research questions that would help us answer different facets of the overall research question: *How and in what ways does the process of OP allow for care to be enacted in teacher–student relations in postsecondary institutions?*

The sub-research questions are as follows:

- “How have students experienced care (self, other students)?”
- “How have students experienced teacher’s care?”
- “What do students think about open pedagogy?”
- “How does open pedagogy embody an ethics of care?”

According to the sub-research questions above and using the predetermined conceptual categories of the four elements of the ethics of care—attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and trustworthiness—we analyze students’ experience of care and care in OP in more detail below. Note that “responsiveness” is another element of the ethics of care, but we did not portray this here. In the ethics of care elements, “responsiveness” means that the cared for person responds to show that care was received (Held, 2006; Noddings, 2013). We could not investigate this element as it would require longer observation of relations in focus groups and classroom settings. Instead, we categorized codes such as “reciprocity” as part of the “trust building” conceptual category.



## Results

### Student Profiles

The focus group participants were from five subject areas: arts, business, health, social sciences, and science. In the questionnaire, students were asked to identify themselves by race, disability and/or as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit plus (LGBTQ2+) community. Obtaining this unpublishable, protected information ensured underrepresented students would be able to speak freely in the focus groups. Though these populations were not targeted (participants were self-selected), 100% of the focus group students ( $N = 16$ ) were from one or more underrepresented groups by gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, or international student status.

### How Do Students Experience Care in Postsecondary Education?

In this section, we portray students' experience of care. We combine two sub-research questions—“How students have experienced care (self, other students)” and “How students have experienced teacher's care”—since the ethics of care elements are describing relations between people and we are investigating student-to-student and teacher-to-student relations together.

We portray results as themes, using the four elements of care—attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and trustworthiness—and combining students views of student-to-student and teacher-to-student relations under the theme. Our themes below are as follows: “Attentive Students and Teachers”; “Responsible Students and Teachers”; “Competent Students and Teachers”; and “Students and Teachers Building Trust.”

#### ***Attentive Students and Teachers***

To be attentive is to be mindful, observant, and receptive. Many students stated that “attention” and “empathy” represented care for them; they had *sometimes* experienced this care in postsecondary education. Students experienced teachers' care when teachers provided individual attention, such as reaching out for personal “check-ins” and treating students as “whole people.” Teachers were considered receptive (attentive) if they were available and gave their time. Students also experienced teachers as attentive (mindful) if teachers openly addressed inequalities of our institutional systems.

#### ***Responsible Students and Teachers***

To be responsible is to figure out how to provide respectful care and to provide care even if there is no response. Students experienced responsible care from other students when they were “non-judgmental” when creating curriculum together. As participants said, teachers would “take responsibility” when they used clear communication and guidelines and designed ways to encourage student connections with each other.

Students also experienced challenges to experiencing responsible care, for example, when they did not feel safe. As one student shared, when the teacher saw their many-coloured pens, “The teacher said, ‘Ya, right, her coloured pens. It's so silly. Like what is this, Kindergarten?’ I was shocked . . . It made me feel less safe to speak in his class.”

### ***Competent Students and Teachers***

To be competent is to be able to show care by developing knowledge and skills to meet a variety of needs. Students described showing and receiving competent care from other students when there was active participation in the course community. Students experienced teachers as caring when teachers provided relevant curriculum and created materials and activities that were contextualized, authentic, and inclusive (e.g., diverse readings). Care for students was shown by teachers providing choices, alternative assessments, and low-stakes options such as participants suggesting “games” that encouraged learning and “fun.” Students believed that when teachers inflexibly adhered to the rules, teachers were not showing care.

### ***Students and Teachers Building Trust***

To build trust is to take on the sustained responsibility and attentiveness of providing care. Students want care to be reciprocated by other students. When discussing caring teaching approaches, one participant shared:

In my class we are free to speak as much or as little as we like. We often use the break to talk with other class members. I feel more at ease in that class because I can express my opinions without any judgement, and I feel welcomed.

However, students shared that they sometimes felt “shy” or “anxious” in trying to make connections with others. Some students expressed a need to focus on their jobs, their own academic careers, and “personal lives,” which created challenges in showing care. One participant stated, “Sometimes a student is working part time. They’re taking full-time courses. They’re probably falling behind in their courses.”

To help build a sense of trust within the classroom, students thought that teachers could be facilitative of connections by talking about their own lives. Students also believed that teachers were trustworthy when the teacher took time to solicit student input and encouraged their agency. Students contrasted that sense of trust with experiences of teachers being dismissive of students or treating them, as one participant mentioned, like “robots.”

Another participant stated: “With professors, care is not returned when it’s just empty words and intentional egotistical misunderstanding of what we are going through. [The professor believes] you just need to power it through and get this done for me.”

As above, the researchers portrayed the results under four themes. In addition to the student’s own words above, see Table 3 below for a condensed interpretation of ways students experience care under these themes.

**Table 3**

*Student Characterizations of Care*

Role	Attentive	Responsible	Competent	Trustworthy
Students show care (to selves, other students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No judgement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reciprocity</li> <li>• Peer support</li> </ul>
Teachers show care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check-ins</li> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Sustained, intentional attention</li> <li>• Seeing whole person</li> <li>• Addressing power inequalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear guidelines</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Designing ways to support connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive materials</li> <li>• Relevant curriculum</li> <li>• Student experience included</li> <li>• Alternative assessments</li> <li>• Low stakes activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging connections</li> <li>• Soliciting student input</li> <li>• Encouraging student agency</li> <li>• Being vulnerable</li> </ul>

**Open Pedagogy: How Is Care Experienced?**

In this section, we show students’ perspectives on OP, combining two sub-questions: “What do students think about OP?” and “How does OP embody an ethics of care?” Again, we express the results as themes. Our themes below are as follows: “Attentive Students and Teachers”; “Responsible Students and Teachers”; “Competent Students and Teachers”; and “Students and Teachers Building Trust.” We again combine participant views of student-to student relations and teacher-to-student relations under the themes. For a condensed interpretation of ways participants experience care in OP, see Figure 1 below.

***Attentive Students and Teachers***

As highlighted above, attentive care means being mindful, observant, and receptive. From an OP perspective, students emphasized that instructors could show attentive care by providing or co-creating curriculum that is inclusive and representative of the diverse population. As one participant shared,

. . . knowing that more marginalized people are being represented properly. That is first and foremost what I think care looks like in this situation. Knowing people took the time to properly represent other peoples’ experiences that maybe don’t have their experiences as magnified as more dominant.

Students also felt that teachers being receptive was important; that meant not just being available, but overtly addressing the inequality of power/relationships in the classroom and building student perspectives into the curriculum.

### ***Responsible Students and Teachers***

Students felt that OP would enable them to be more responsible. Students shared that contributing to current and future student learning—by creating and sharing materials, providing constructive feedback, and being active participants in a wider learning community—were ways of showing care. To students, care could be shown by providing recognition for others' work, including sharing and commenting on that work, or "citing it."

At the same time, students shared that open pedagogical processes (student-directed learning) might impart too much responsibility. A participant stated,

I would freak out ... I am always over stressed about the quality of the work that I put in, but I think it would have the extra layer if I don't do this right ... if somebody else needs this for their career and I don't give them the right information, then I would feel that stress.

Students also believed that they needed teachers' guidance about the rationale for, and benefits of, OP. They also suggested that they needed encouragement as they learned how to create their own materials, take more self-direction, and provide peer feedback.

### ***Competent Students and Teachers***

As previously highlighted, competent care means people use and develop broad knowledge and skills to meet needs. From an OP perspective, students shared that having relevant, accurate OER that elicited meaningful learning would be caring. For students, relevance meant that content and assignments had links to the real world (authenticity), were relatable (to their own contexts), were transferable, and also helped them learn. Students emphasized that OP can provide opportunities for meaningful learning that "sparks imagination," is "super empowering," and helps students feel they are "making a difference."

In the focus groups, students shared concerns about accuracy, both in creating materials themselves and in not feeling confident enough to critique others. They believed that instructors showed care when they provided clear feedback and corrections around misconceptions or errors. In the final reflections of the student case writers ( $N = 6$ ), after participating in their own OP only one writer-participant continued to express concern about "low quality writing." One writer-participant said that they had never been concerned because they expected the teacher to review the OER. Other writer-participants changed their perspective because they believed their peer review process had ensured accuracy. A writer-participant stated,

After going through the whole writing process myself, I am starting to think that OER are not that bad. ... The writing process is extensive and well thought by the student writers [who] are the editors. The ongoing reviews on the same piece of writing is [sic] what makes it so much more inclusive of any potential readers of the resource. The reviewing is done by a wide variety of people all of different genders, beliefs, race, etc., this diversity makes the resource quite accurate and inclusive of all readers.

Those writer-participants who had gone through the peer review process during asynchronous case writing were less concerned about accuracy of materials. However, throughout the results, including in the final

reflections by case writers ( $N = 6$ ), some participants still believed that they needed teachers to help ensure that they were being inclusive in their OP processes and in their OER.

### ***Students and Teachers Building Trust***

Students said trust could be built if teachers intentionally plan for student connections, including encouraging students to have “roundtable” discussions with each other to plan OP projects. Students shared that a sense of reciprocity in their OP processes and the learning community—not being “competitive,” compromising, not judging, sharing materials—would create trust and show care. A participant stated,

Because maybe someone can give you insight on how they do it or what worked for them, and then you can try it out too. [There is a] community, maybe you can meet like-minded people who care so much about the subject.

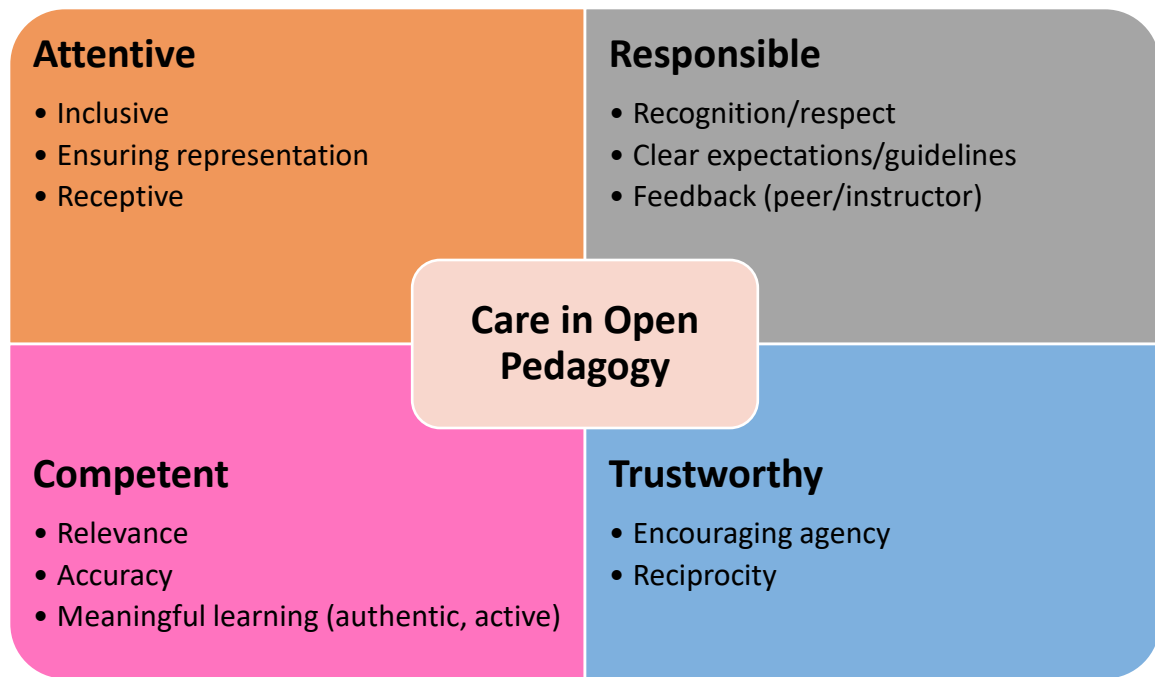
That desired sense of reciprocity was present in the focus group process. Part of the research design was to investigate the active OP process in the focus groups, and we observed active sharing of ideas, student initiative (agency), and respectful peer feedback. The writer-participants who worked on the cases later, confirmed that having agency was significant, with a writer-participant stating, “[We had] space and liberty.”

For students, encouraging agency builds trust. Students also highlighted ways teachers might discourage agency and suggested they needed guidance, but not rigid rules: “I feel like [restrictive guidelines] would almost stifle creativity, especially if all of a sudden you have these sort of rules and regulations.”

In addition to the participants’ own words above, Figure 1 displays a condensed interpretation of ways participants experience care in OP under the four themes.

**Figure 1**

*Participant Perspectives: Care in Open Pedagogy*



## Discussion

This study focused on student perspectives of the care they have experienced in postsecondary institutions. The study then explored how OP can promote student and teacher relationships of care. Our findings resonate with past studies and further elaborate on researchers, educators and students' views on pedagogical care and on OP.

As highlighted in Table 1, we believe that OP is an actualization of the ethics of care. According to students, OP, because of its relational, collaborative nature, highly values and embodies care. The processes of OP encourage students and teachers to be attentive, responsible, competent, and trust-building. This research demonstrates that these students view the exemplifiers of teaching practice such as "giving time" as, in fact, features of a practice of care. Students also view exemplifiers of OP such as "creating relevant curriculum" as features of an overarching practice of care.

The researchers used the elements of the ethics of care as the categories for analyzing data. Firstly, concerning results about *attentiveness*, students in this research suggest that they experience care from teachers if attention is sustained and intentional. As students are more likely to show care for one another when they are actively participating in class and groups, we suggest that teachers design for these opportunities. In an OP practice, teachers can foster sustained and intentional attention by creating inclusive, democratic classrooms, soliciting student perspectives, listening to student's requests for representation, and encouraging everyone to take their own lives into account during projects (Anderson et

al., 2020; Faulkner et al., 2020; Sinkinson & McClure, n.d., 2021; Vojtech & Grisset, 2017; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). Students also expect teachers to address power imbalances in and outside of the classroom. Literature suggests that addressing power imbalances and working for social good are built-in aims of OP (Bali et al., 2020; DeRosa & Jhangiani, n.d.).

Secondly, concerning results about *responsibility*, students shared that they experienced *responsible* care from other students when those students were non-judgmental. Responsible care from teachers would mean teachers use clear communication and guidelines and help to create group processes that promote dialogue, as suggested by Lansdown (2021) and Waghid (2018). Teachers can design for collaboration and intentional student connections (Axe et al., 2020; Hegarty, 2015; Velasquez et al., 2013). Teachers can provide scaffolding and feedback for writing and collaboration (Axe et al., 2020; Baran & AlZoubi, 2020).

While students want to contribute to the wider learning community by being involved in OP and by sharing OER, as acts of responsible care, and while students see the benefits of doing so for themselves and other students, they are also somewhat concerned about the responsibility of creation and public sharing (Harrison, 2021; Hendricks, 2021). Not all research indicates that students are concerned about public sharing (Clinton-Lisell, 2021; Werth & Williams, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020) and teachers and students could ameliorate this concern by giving sustained attention and building trusting collaborative processes in OP projects.

Thirdly, concerning results about *competence*, students experienced teachers as providing *competent* care when teachers facilitate meaningful learning by providing or co-creating relevant curriculum. Other literature explored “relevance” not as a sign of care but as an enabler of student engagement and learning in OP (Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Werth & Williams, 2021). Students view the offering or co-creating of relevant and accurate curriculum/OER as competent care. Although current participants and some research show concerns about ensuring OER is accurate (Hilton III et al., 2019), some students in this study changed their perspective following their own OP process. They now believed their peer review process ensured enough accuracy and authenticity. A guided peer review process may help allay concerns for many students. However, these students still want teachers to help correct misconceptions, to help them integrate student experiences, and to offer or co-create materials that are authentic and unbiased. Students also highly value and want help to ensure inclusion and representation of the diverse population in their OER and in their own class experiences; the literature confirms that this inclusion and representation should happen (Bovill et al., 2016; Mariskind, 2014; Parvati, 2019; Robertson, 2020).

Fourthly, concerning results about *trustworthiness*, the students say that the teachers’ actions as outlined above—soliciting student input and planning for student connections—are acts of responsible, competent care that also *build trust*. Similar to other studies, students believed that teachers build trust when the teachers act like whole people (Frizelle, 2020), see students as whole people, and encourage student agency (Anderson et al., 2020; Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Werth & Williams, 2021).

Students were able to build trust with peers when there was an overall sense of reciprocity—interacting, compromising, and sharing materials. That building of trust would then help students interact with and trust the wider learning community (DeRosa & Robison, 2017). Although students reported being more awkward with than mistrustful of others, students encountered challenges in showing care to others since

they sometimes needed to focus on their own studies and lives. As suggested by Lolich & Lynch (2016), Molesworth et al. (2009), and Tomlinson (2016), this could indicate that students are pressured by their institutions to individually compete to succeed in the commercialized educational setting. Students' responsibility to be mindful and solicitous of others may not be fostered in their education programs. As suggested by Held (2006), Noddings (2012, 2013) and Tronto (2013), care requires not only *trust building*, but also a mindset of *attentiveness* and the development of *competence* to provide care. Students and teachers need to see themselves as embedded in relationships and *responsible* for providing care in educational settings, rather than students seeing themselves as paying customers and teachers seeing themselves as service providers in a business.

### Limitations and Future Research

The students self-selected into the research. Although not recruited specifically, the focus group students were all from underrepresented groups. Drawing students from four institutions and hearing the perspectives of underrepresented students allowed for significant insights. However, the students were from smaller teaching-based institutions in British Columbia, Canada. Internationally, students' experience may differ. Future studies could investigate what types of students, in what programs, are interested in the values of OP and, therefore, volunteer for research.

The focus group series and reflections took approximately eight hours. Unlike projects conducted in a course, this was not enough time to observe full student participation in the OP process. Longitudinal research could follow students in OP projects, including those in courses with graded assessments and in low stakes cross-institutional projects.

## Conclusion

OP has been researched in terms of student perspectives, including whether students experienced relevant, engaging learning. This research heard the thoughtful insights of students who wanted to speak about the curriculum and their relations with teachers and other students. These students have described many ways that students and teachers show care. To them, OP is a significant educational process in which care is already embodied. The student perspective is that the practice of care is all-encompassing, including all the exemplifiers of care and the OP qualities analyzed above. Valuing and deliberately practising care would counteract the increasing commercialization of postsecondary education, which doesn't encourage relationships, collaboration, or exploratory learning. Care is and should be the overarching value and practice in education.

OP is a process able to fully involve a diverse population of students, create democratic, inclusive environments, and embody care. With teacher support as needed and designed practices of care, in OP, students can assert their agency, have quintessential roles in creating and participating in highly relevant curriculum, and, importantly, care and be cared for. Students and teachers can practise attentive, responsible, competent, trust-building care in OP processes. Making the practice of care that is already happening in OP explicit and valued can buttress the open education movement in its aims to democratize



education and involve self-directed students in contributing to open knowledge and social good beyond the classroom.

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