

What is Open Pedagogy?

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Using OER the same way we used commercial textbooks misses the point. OER are: free to access, free to reuse, free for remixing. How can we extend, revise, and remix our pedagogy based on these additional capabilities? There are many, many potential answers to this question.

Hundreds of thousands of words have been written about open educational resources, but precious little has been written about how OER – or openness more generally – changes the practice of education. Substituting OER for expensive commercial resources definitely save money and increase access to core instructional materials. Increasing access to core instructional materials will necessarily make significant improvements in learning outcomes for students who otherwise wouldn't have had access to the materials (e.g., couldn't afford to purchase their textbooks). If the percentage of those students in a given population is large enough, their improvement in learning may even be detectable when comparing learning in the population before OER adoption with learning in the population after OER adoption. Saving significant amounts of money and doing no harm to learning outcomes (or even slightly improving learning outcomes) is clearly a win. However, there are much bigger victories to be won with openness.

Using OER the same way we used commercial textbooks misses the point. It's like driving an airplane down the road. Yes, the airplane has wheels and is capable of driving down on the road (provided the road is wide enough). But the point of an airplane is to fly at hundreds of miles per hour – not to drive. Driving an airplane around, simply because driving is how we always traveled in the past, squanders the huge potential of the airplane. So what is the analogous additional potential of open educational resources, compared to commercial textbooks and other commercial resources? OER are:

- Free to access
- Free to reuse
- Free to revise

- Free to remix
- Free to redistribute

The question becomes, then, what is the relationship between these additional capabilities and what we know about effective teaching and learning? How can we extend, revise, and remix our pedagogy based on these additional capabilities? There are many, many potential answers to this question. Here's one example.

Killing the Disposable Assignment

If you've heard me speak in the last several months, you've probably heard me rail against "disposable assignments." These are assignments that students complain about doing and faculty complain about grading. They're assignments that add no value to the world – after a student spends three hours creating it, a teacher spends 30 minutes grading it, and then the student throws it away. Not only do these assignments add no value to the world, they actually suck value out of the world. Talk about an incredible waste of time and brain power (an a potentially huge source of cognitive surplus)!

What if we changed these "disposable assignments" into activities which actually added value to the world? Then students and faculty might feel different about the time and effort they invested in them. I have seen time and again that they *do* feel different about the efforts they make under these circumstances.

But which effective practices specifically might we remix in order to kill the disposable assignment? I love John Hattie's book [Visible Learning](#) as a source for finding effective practices. In the book Hattie compiles findings across over 800 meta-analyses of 50,000 studies of 80,000,000 students to arrive at average effect sizes for over 130 influences on learning, including student influences, teacher influences, teaching influences, and school influences. Here are a few that resonate with me, together with their effect sizes as estimated by Hattie, a brief description, and page numbers from the first edition:

Teacher Student Relationships = 0.72

"Developing relationships requires skills by the teacher – such as the skills of listening, empathy, caring, and having positive regard for others.... Teachers should learn to facilitate students' development by demonstrating that they care for the learning of each student as a person and empathizing with students." Pp. 118-119.

Teacher Clarity = 0.75

Clarity – as rated by students (not other teachers) – in "organization, explanation, examples and guided practice, and assessment of student learning." P. 126.

Worked Examples = 0.57

"Worked examples reduce the cognitive load for students such that they concentrate on the processes that lead to the correct answer and not just providing an answer." P. 172.

Organizing and Transforming = 0.85

"Overt or covert rearrangement of instructional materials to improve learning. (e.g., making an outline before writing a paper).... The types of strategies included in this category (such as summarizing and paraphrasing) promote a more active approach to learning tasks." Pp. 190-191.

Feedback = 0.73

Pp. 173-178.

Reciprocal Teaching = 0.74

"The emphasis is on teachers enabling their students to learn and use cognitive strategies such as summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting.... The effects were highest when there was explicit teaching of cognitive strategies before beginning reciprocal teaching." P. 204.

An Example of Open Pedagogy

When you can assume that all the materials you're using in and with your class are open educational resources, here's one way to remix the effective practices listed above with OER in order to provide you and your students with opportunities to spend your time and effort on work that makes the world a better place instead of wasting it on disposable assignments.

- Begin by establish relationships of trust with students. You're about to ask them to do something they've probably never tried before. They won't follow you if they don't trust you.
- Provide a clear description of the assignment – students will revise and remix the core instructional materials of the class (which are OER) with other OER and with their own original work in order to create a small tutorial (in any medium) on a topic that students in the course generally struggle with. They will then use their tutorial to teach the topic to one of their peers. The best tutorials will be integrated into the official OER collection or open textbook for use by other students starting next semester.
- In addition to a clear description of the assignment, you should also provide a detailed description of how the assignment will be graded and/or examples of high-quality student work.
- Show a variety of worked examples. If this is the first time you're using this valuable assignment, use the OER that you've compiled to support student learning as your examples. Talk students through the process of selecting existing resources and remixing them into something that specifically supports their learning. If you have existing student work that you can show, even better.
- Invite students to engage in the remix activity (aka organizing and transforming) with an eye toward their upcoming peer tutoring interactions (using strategies like summarizing, questioning, and clarifying in the design of their remix).
- Provide constructive feedback to students on their remix and invite them to revise their tutorials.
- Once the revisions are complete, invite students to engage in the reciprocal teaching experience. After reciprocal teaching, invite the students to make a final round of revisions based on their partner's experience with the materials.
- After your review, publicly congratulate the students whose tutorials will be integrated into the official course materials for next semester.

This assignment clearly leverages the reuse, revise, remix, redistribute permissions of open educational resources in order to enable students to extend and improve the official instructional materials required for the course. Because students know their work will be used both by their peers and potentially by future generations of students, they invest in this work at a different level. Because the assignment encourages them to work in any medium they prefer, students pick something they'll enjoy, which leads them to invest at a different level. Because any one of these remixes might end up helping next semester's students finally grasp the concept that has proven so difficult in the past, faculty are willing to invest in feedback and encouragement at a different level.

Examples of Student Work in the Context of Open Pedagogy

I've been iterating over a version of this approach for several years now. While nothing is universally effective, it tends to result in insanely awesome student work. An early version of this assignment back in 2007 brought you [Kennedy and Nixon](#) debating the merits of blogs and wikis, [Rick Noblenski: Blasting Caps Expert and Wiki Advocate](#), and a father and son confrontation over [District Policies Regarding Blogs and Wikis](#).

Later versions of this assignment brought you versions of the open textbook [Project Management for Instructional Designers](#), which now includes multiple video case studies; completely rewritten examples in-text; alignment with the Project Management Professional certification exam; an expanded glossary; and downloadable HTML, PDF, ePub, MOBI, and MP3 versions of the book (among other improvements). The book is also used as the official course text at least one other university.

Of course I'm not the only one experimenting with these kinds of assignments – [Murder, Madness, and Mayhem: Latin American Literature in Translation](#) is another one of my favorites (see this [essay](#) for a description).

Defining Open Pedagogy

What makes this assignment an instance of open pedagogy instead of just another something we require students to do? As described, *the assignment is impossible without the permissions granted by open licenses*. This is the ultimate test of whether or not a particular approach or technique can rightly be called “open pedagogy” – is it possible without the free access and 4R permissions characteristic of open educational resources? If the answer is yes, then you may have an effective educational practice but you don't have an instance of open pedagogy. Open pedagogy is that set of teaching and learning practices only possible in the context of the free access and 4R permissions characteristic of open educational resources.

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