

Using Open Educational Practices to Support Institutional Strategic Excellence in Teaching, Learning & Scholarship

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Abstract

This paper explores the integration of Open Educational Practices (OEP) into an institutional strategy to develop distinctive excellence in teaching, learning and scholarship. The institution in the case study is a public polytechnic university serving a metropolitan area in Canada. If emerging Open Educational Practices are to flourish at our university, support for OEP must integrate with and contribute to our broader efforts to clarify and enhance our strategic position.

We have identified three focal points where our institution can focus attention in order to ensure that our use of emerging Open Educational Practices will best align with, contribute to, and benefit from our institutional strategy for distinctive excellence in teaching and learning:

- Opening up the pedagogy underlying exemplary OER, to enable a deeper faculty engagement in integrating and mobilizing diverse sources of knowledge in teaching;
- Opening up that process by which individual faculty improve teaching and learning, as a model for our students' own engagements with knowledge;
- Opening up our collective faculty work in innovation networks, as a model for students and as a signature institutional strength and outcome.

We summarize the rationale and planned next steps for each of these focal points, which are intended to cumulatively build on each other as a value chain to support the development of distinctive graduate capabilities as signature outcomes of our teaching and learning.

Keywords: Higher Education, Open Educational Practices, Open Innovation, Teaching and Learning Strategy

Introduction

The “Open” nature of Open Education has expanded over time, in meaning and in importance. The first open institutions focused on Open Educational Access, breaking down barriers to extend opportunity to students who had been limited by traditional institutions. Open Educational Resources (OER) became a complementary strand of open education, offering the promise of reduced costs for students, reduced time required to develop and revise course offerings, and improved quality of teaching and learning leading to student success.

More recently, the notion of Open Educational Practices has been developed to frame “the next phase in OER development, which will see a shift from a focus on resources to a focus on open educational practices being a combination of open resources use and open learning architectures to transform learning” (Camilleri & Ehlers, 2011, p. 6). This larger emphasis is concerned with “how learning and teaching practices need to accommodate more open approaches to knowledge sharing” (McGill, Falconer, Beetham & Littlejohn, 2012, p. 3). The scope of Open Educational Practices continues to evolve, including concepts such as

- open pedagogies to document the rationale behind designs for learning,
- open exchange of teaching expertise, open scholarship to extend our knowledge of teaching and learning, and

- open technologies to facilitate collaboration around open education (Beetham, Falconer, McGill & Littlejohn, 2012).

In our institutional context as a regional polytechnic university—outlined in the following section—the first two elements of Open Education above are a means to fulfill our regional mandate. Opening up new access opportunities for students and leveraging open educational resources for high quality teaching and learning support our institutional mission to serve the educational needs of our region, but will be difficult to leverage on their own as a source of reputational capital for excellence in teaching and learning. On the other hand, we describe below the potential for emerging Open Educational Practices to make a more strategic contribution as a source of distinctive excellence in teaching and learning and as a direction for aligning our plans for open education and our other academic endeavours.

In this paper we report on our identification of initial focal areas for our use of Open Educational Practices, in order to test the strategic institutional benefits which they can provide for us. This account begins with outlines of our university's context and role within our public higher education system, and of our plans in open education. We then summarize the principles underlying our academic strategy for distinctive excellence in teaching and learning, and follow that with a description, rationale and next steps around the following three specific directions:

- Opening up the pedagogy underlying exemplary OER, to enable a deeper faculty engagement in integrating and mobilizing diverse sources of knowledge in teaching;
- Opening up that process by which individual faculty improve teaching and learning, as a model for our students' own engagements with knowledge;
- Opening up our collective faculty work in innovation networks, as a model for students and as a signature institutional strength and outcome

This paper is written from the perspective of the two senior academic leaders—the President and Provost—and the advisors laying the groundwork for the Open Studies plan and the institutional strategy in teaching and learning. We know we must be selective in planning how we will invest in support for teaching, learning and scholarship. If emerging Open Educational Practices are to flourish at our university, support for OEP must integrate with and contribute to our broader efforts to clarify and enhance our strategic position through distinctive excellence in teaching and learning. We have determined that these three focal points provide the most potential for our use of emerging Open Educational Practices to align with, contribute to, and benefit from our institutional strategy for teaching and learning. We recognize that other institutions will find other focal points suited to their contexts and needs; our case study illustrates that a disciplined effort to integrate OEP as an aspect of institutional strategy can yield valuable results in identifying the areas of most promise on which to focus further integration efforts.

Institutional Context

Kwantlen Polytechnic University evolved from a university college context, and continues to offer multiple pathways leading to university credentials including certificate, diploma, and degree programs in the traditional liberal arts and science disciplines, in trades and technology fields, and in career and professional areas. As the only polytechnic university in the Canadian province of British Columbia (B.C.), we are committed to developing high quality capabilities for our graduates' professional and trades/technology careers (as a polytechnic institution), and also for their roles as community members and global citizens (as a university). As a public institution, we have always been committed to serving the diverse needs of our region (the southern part of the greater Vancouver

area of British Columbia). Finally, our location on Canada's west coast gives us a particular opportunity and responsibility to prepare graduates with global perspectives and competencies, and to offer a supportive learning environment to international students.

KPU's Academic Plan 2014–2018 (KPU, 2014) proposes a strategy which reflects and invigorates our provincial mandate as a special purpose teaching-intensive university serving the southern municipalities in the greater Vancouver area (B.C. AVED, 2014). In addition to Open Studies, the Plan targets the following high priority advances in our teaching and learning environment (which includes classroom, blended, experiential and online learning opportunities):

- Enhance support for our faculty and other educators in mobilizing the emergent knowledge base for teaching and learning in their subject areas, in connecting to their larger professional communities, and in developing, adapting and evaluating new pedagogies;
- Increase experiential learning opportunities and strengthen the definition and assessment of institution-wide graduate attributes;
- Integrate curricular and co-curricular activities to ensure student success and well-being.

KPU Open Studies

Unlike many institutions engaging deeply with Open Educational Practices, we are not the designated “open” institution within the public higher education sector: another university is charged with providing “open learning access, including distance education and flexible degree-completion options” (B.C. AVED, 2014). Open access services at Thompson Rivers University's Open Learning include “a continuous enrolment schedule and an open admission policy that sets it apart from other BC institutions” (TRU, 2014). In addition, support for open education, open textbooks and open practices is available through BCcampus (BCcampus, 2014), a collaboration of all the provinces' public post-secondary institutions.

The Open Studies Plan includes components for an ongoing commitment to participate internationally in Open Educational Resources University (OERu), provincially in British Columbia initiatives in Open Textbooks, and regionally in providing open access to increase post-secondary attainment. The Open Studies Plan includes the following elements:

- Establish an annual Institutional Action Plan to define our contribution to the OERu strategy, as outlined by the OERu Council of CEOs in November 2014 (OERu, 2014)
- Within the 2015 plan, identify five courses to be developed for contribution to OERu as well as for an OERu pathway to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition at KPU.
- Develop the courses using an agile open design process, with a collaborative “course sprint” model involving instructors, library staff, technical staff and media staff
- Select OER textbook resources from the BCcampus SOL*R digital library (Porter, 2013) or other open digital collections as the basis for the development process
- Use the development process to model open educational practices with faculty and staff.
- Design, pilot and launch a “Textbook Zero” approach to program development as a key strategy for the launch of KPU Open Studies. A Textbook Zero approach (Bliss, 2015) uses customizable open resources for all courses in a first or second year program.) We will also actively draw upon the resources of the BC Open Textbook Program (BCcampus, 2014)

Emerging Principles for our Strategy of Distinctive Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship

A strategy for distinctive excellence in teaching and learning has a number of potential benefits for our mission, our students and our region. As a relatively new university, we must compete for

attention and resources as we become one of the key assets within our public system of higher education (and our graduates must compete with those from older universities for the best career opportunities). Close ties with our graduates employed by regional companies and organizations support our teaching mission by providing extensive opportunities for experiential learning. For our region, achieving a larger measure of recognition for our exemplary teaching can increase the benefits of our presence, including serving as a model for other regional organizations to aspire to excellence (Carey, 2014) and bringing in new talent through students from elsewhere who as graduates decide to live in the region (Austin, 2012).

As guiding concepts in the development of our strategy for a distinctive excellence in teaching and learning, two principles are emerging from our study of exemplary plans from other institutions and internal discussions with our faculty and academic leadership:

- ***How we know is a key part of what we know:*** As a polytechnic university, we value, develop, integrate and apply a full range of knowledge and ways of knowing—about our subject areas and about ourselves. Accordingly, in our learning, teaching and scholarship we take care to integrate a full range of knowledge practices as outlined above: the craft and skills of individual teachers, the professional knowledge of our broader teaching communities, and evidence from scholarly research and our own data analytics.

KPU is in the process of revitalizing our Institute for Innovation and Scholarship in Teaching and Learning (INSTL) through campus-wide consultations aimed at identifying precise needs, current challenges and sector-wide advances that may inform and enhance our teaching mandate. INSTL's mandate is to promote exemplary teaching practices and connect our faculty and students to the dynamic global arena of teaching and learning. INSTL's varied activities will support our academic goal to

recognize, nurture and promote exemplary teaching with the following range of knowledge practices:

- the practical skills and craft for our teaching work. . .
- the breadth and depth of understanding for our teaching as knowledge professionals. . .
- the creative discipline needed for the work of teaching as inquiry and innovation

(Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2014 p. 8)

We know this will be a challenge for learning and development that we must address in enacting our Academic Plan. As a consequence, in our consideration of Open Educational Practices we will be seeking ways to systematically support our teachers in developing their own craft and skills for teaching, in learning about the professional knowledge base for teaching in their subject areas and in creative inquiry and disciplined innovation. The result must be a way of knowing, doing and being that reflects their individual identity as teachers and at the same time is embedded in and committed to our larger professional communities of teaching knowledge, practice and scholarship (Kreber, 2010).

- ***How we teach is a key part of what we teach:*** As a teaching-focused institution, rich interactions amongst faculty and students are one of our signature characteristics. We want to leverage this strength through the insight we have quoted here from Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* (Palmer, 2010). For us, "how we teach is a key part of what we teach" goes beyond the original intent that our engagements with students model the capabilities and commitments we want them to develop (e.g. that we must demonstrate in class the respect for diversity and cultural differences that we want to see in our graduates). Our polytechnic university conception of knowledge practices within our teaching activity therefore goes beyond supporting students interactions with subject matter knowledge, to also include serving as exemplars for our students' own engagements with

knowledge in their professional careers (and also in their other roles as community members and global citizens).

Accordingly, in our consideration of Open Educational Practices we want to include in “how we teach” ways to make transparent how our faculty members (and other educators) engage with knowledge and knowledge communities in their instructional design activities to advance teaching and learning. This has led us to expect that ‘how we learn (as teachers) will become a key part of what we teach. . .and what students learn’.

Connecting with emerging developments in Open Educational Practices to support these principles

As noted in section 2 (about institutional context), our involvement with Open Educational Practices is a means to support our university’s educational mission, not an end in itself or a signature characteristic of our mandate within the province’s public sector of higher education. However, we know that we will be able to provide more support for Open Educational Practices when those practices and principles align with and support the principles and directions for our institutional strategies as outlined in the previous section (Carey & Hanley, 2008).

- ***How we know is a key part of what we know:*** as one example of the links between our OEP commitment and our strategy for teaching and learning, we are exploring how we can engage our faculty in applying multiple kinds of knowledge in creation, adaptation and use of Open Educational Resources—and how the competencies and dispositions developed in our OER work can be leveraged in support of broader change in teaching and learning. These online interactions around open, reusable resources form a basis for new open knowledge practices (Littlejohn & Pegler, 2014). The infrastructure to enable such interactions, across our campuses and with wider discipline communities for professional teaching, is continuing to evolve.

For example, an *open course framework* (Wiley, Bliss & McEwen, 2014) for teaching with online learning consists of a set of shared online learning activities and resources for learning in a topic area, along with module and course designs using and adapting the shared resources for different contexts. We are exploring how our faculty can create deeper knowledge integration to contribute and enrich the rationale presented for particular designs and adaptations, as they create and adapt OER materials.

Another emerging infrastructure development promises to go further: a *course ecosystem* is intended to contain the elements of an open course framework community while also addressing the larger issues of changes in policy and practices, “including how best to provide incentives and rewards for faculty who contribute to a multi-institutional project, how to promote a culture of innovation, and how to structure investments to take full advantage of present and future technology” (APLU, 2014).

We believe the evolution of these enhanced knowledge practices and knowledge sharing infrastructure associated with open course frameworks and ecosystems has potential as a major ‘generational change’, on the order of the shift from learning objects to open educational resources (Lane & McAndrew, 2010), and we want to be sure our faculty contribute to this progress and leverage the emerging open knowledge communities and practices to improve student success.

- ***How we teach is a key part of what we teach:*** we expect that the use of open educational practices will in many cases lead to innovation in teaching methods and resultant changes to student learning activity: for students as for faculty, “working and learning in open networks is qualitatively

different from conventional practice” (Littlejohn & Pegler, 2014, n.p.). For example, the work in the European COLEARN project used open educational practices to develop students’ competencies for co-learning and co-inquiry (Okada, Rabello & Ferreira, 2014). As a local example from our university community, a faculty member drew parallels for us between his professional practice as a music producer and the emerging practice of teaching at KPU—as an open and collaborative exercise that reflects nascent Open Educational Practices while enabling a collective (student-faculty) agency in learning, creativity, engagement and cooperative knowledge acquisition.

We can also see ways to use our OER involvement to engage students as partners in developing and adapting new learning resources and teaching practices (Carey, Harrigan, Palmer & Swallow, 1999), an approach that is being incorporated elsewhere into institutional strategy for teaching and learning (e.g., the Students as Academic Partners program at Birmingham City University (CELT, 2014)). The benefits students receive from this experience are typically focused on their experiences as learners in our programs, including deeper knowledge of subject area concepts in the OER, stronger sense of control or autonomy in their education, and an appreciation for the complexities of teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten, 2014; Hockings, Brett & Terentjevs, 2012).

In our context, we want to explore how students’ engagement with OER can impact their knowledge practices beyond their time as students, as a model for the integration and mobilization of knowledge to improve practice in future professional careers. We are therefore exploring ways in which our faculty members’ engagement in the creation, adaptation and application of OER can be shared with students to increase their understanding of the integration and mobilization of knowledge to improve work practices and performance.

We would also like our students to perceive these changes in their teaching and learning environment as innovations in work practices, and to reflect on their reactions to the changes as an experiential learning opportunity to prepare them for development and dissemination of innovative practices in their future career roles. We expect all of these emerging developments to help move us further as an institution toward distinctive outcomes of excellence in teaching and learning.

Focal points for integrating OEP with institutional strategy for teaching and learning

The investigation outlined in the previous section resulted in our identification of three specific focal points in which we could derive the most benefit from the integration of our use of emerging Open Educational Practices with the development of our institutional strategy for distinctive excellence in teaching and learning:

- i. Opening up the pedagogy underlying exemplary OER, to enable a deeper faculty engagement in integrating and mobilizing diverse sources of knowledge in teaching;
- ii. Opening up that process by which individual faculty improve teaching and learning, as a model for our students’ own engagements with knowledge;
- iii. Opening up our collective faculty work in innovation networks, as a model for students and as a signature institutional strength and outcome

We summarize next the rationale and planned next steps for each of these focal points, which are intended to build on each other as a value chain to create distinctive graduate capabilities as signature outcomes of our teaching and learning environment. Amongst the many advantages which Open Educational Practices bring to teaching and learning, we identified only a select few as having high potential to contribute to our institutional strategy for distinctive excellence. These select focal points for Openness in our own teaching and learning practices will guide our efforts to follow up on strategy development with more concrete plans (Martin, 2013).

i) *Opening up pedagogy, to integrate and mobilize diverse knowledge in teaching*

There are many proven advantages to institutional use of Open Educational Resources which we also intend to leverage as part of our Academic Plan, such as lower costs to students, and faster accelerated development of new courses and programs. However, these benefits do not directly support our emerging institutional strategy for distinctive excellence (e.g., removing barriers to access by holding down costs does not translate into a signature strength by which our graduates can stand out).

In contrast, the analysis in the previous section highlights the potential contribution of OER use to our distinctive role as a polytechnic university which values and mobilizes multiple types of knowledge and diverse sources of knowledge. This leads us to focus on OER products and processes which cause us to think more deeply about pedagogy, to incorporate additional approaches to exemplary teaching, and to contribute our own insights and expertise in turn.

As our future plans begin to sharpen their focus on these aspects of OER, there can be multiple implications for the decisions we make. For example, in developing plans for our course contributions to OERu, a higher priority can be given to opportunities to leverage and adapt open educational resources from elsewhere which have rich explanations of the pedagogical rationale, underlying context and supporting data. We can particularly benefit from pedagogical explanations using multiple types of knowledge, e.g., design-based research that systematically builds on craft knowledge in teaching, evolving knowledge from the professional teaching community adapted to reflect local context and needs, and rigorous studies of more mature approaches. Currently, our course planning has not considered the nature and extent of this supporting pedagogical knowledge supporting OER in choosing which courses should have higher priority for development as open educational resources.

ii) *Opening up individual faculty work to improve teaching, as a model for students*

The support infrastructure for the knowledge practices outlined in the previous paragraphs will also support the opening up of faculty work as a model for students' own engagement with knowledge, such as the open course frameworks and course ecosystems mentioned above. However, we will need additional methods in order for our students to build awareness of the knowledge practices that faculty are using to improve teaching practice. We will need to go beyond documenting the rationale behind open *products* to documenting the *processes* by which a particular teaching approach or learning resource was shaped to meet the needs of the students.

Our initial plans for this area are expected to centre on pilot projects in curriculum areas where these processes to improve teaching practice have a natural affinity with student interests (e.g., in our School of Design). We can build on past examples of documenting and sharing the process of improving teaching and learning, such as the Carnegie Foundation's *Gallery of Teaching and Learning* (Carnegie, 2006) which used multimedia Course Portfolios to document the ways faculty members engaged with knowledge of diverse types to improve student success in particular courses. These approaches also reflect the tradition of Narrative Inquiry as a way to advance teaching practice (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002).

Further experimentation will be required to develop ways to share with students these processes of knowledge mobilization applied to improve teaching. Some pilots may use resources such as Course Portfolios as outlined above; others may be much less formal, such as an introductory reflection before students undertake a learning activity, or as preparation for a student-faculty partnership to evaluate or extend an innovation in teaching (Cook-Sather *et al.*, 2014; Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014).

iii) ***Opening up collective faculty work in innovation networks, as a model for students***

Going forward, we can also see that our participation in emerging networks for open educational practices can be an exemplar for our students of Cooperative Open Innovation Networks as an organizational structure for leveraging complementary strengths within and across organizations. Cooperative Innovation Networks have demonstrated multiple benefits to participants:

- “pursuit of innovations across [organizational] boundaries through the sharing of ideas, knowledge, expertise, and opportunities” (Ketchen, Ireland & Snow, 2007, p. 371)
- a focus on “something more ambitious than we could do with our internal resources” allowing us to “transcend the old boundaries and rethink roles and the way they are organized” (Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2012, p. 18)
- “a collective. . .pooling of diverse and complementary resources to stimulate and accelerate innovation. . .[for] dynamic, collaborative and far-sighted research that leads to wide dissemination and exploitation” (Jarvenpaa & Wernick, 2012, p. 17)

We are still in a very preliminary stage of thinking through how this kind of work by our faculty with Open Educational Practices can be developed as a signature institutional strength, and in turn leveraged to produce signature learning outcomes for our students. All three of these elements of Open Educational Practices will be explored further as part of the development of our institutional strategy for distinctive excellence in teaching and learning.

Impacts of engagement with OEP on other aspects of institutional strategy

We noted above that our approach to open educational practices at Kwantlen Polytechnic University reflects our particular mission and context. In this we are not unique: the journey to Open Educational Practices has been highly contextualized for all institutions taking this path (McGill, Falconer, Dempster, Littlejohn & Beetham, 2013).

In our case, we expect the impacts of our OEP commitments to extend beyond knowledge practices in teaching and learning to include our relationships with other organizations and institutions. For example, we have not yet begun to explore how we can link our Open Educational Practices with the “*applied research to serve the needs of our region*” that is part of our institutional mandate. We have close ties with many local organizations through their professional staff who work with us as part-time faculty, and many of our full-time faculty members continue to engage regularly in professional practice.

Our draft institutional Research Plan begins to address similar questions to those we have discussed here regarding the plans for teaching and learning—e.g., “what is distinctive about KPU’s contributions to solving complex human problems” (Kwantlen, 2015, p. 5)—and the answers emerging align with open educational practices as a signature institutional characteristic (e.g., “the overarching aim is to bring together the players, actions and mechanisms needed to. . . share ideas and discoveries”).

For us, this creates distinctive opportunities in the future to include open educational practices in our activities with regional organizations to develop their capability for integrating and mobilizing knowledge to improve practices, products and policies. We see an opportunity (and a need) to explore further how participation in Open Educational Practices can develop our institutional capability for engagement in this kind of collaboration with our regional partnerships for applied research, and serve as a model to help our students understand the benefits and challenges of such collaborations.

We will be looking for additional ways to apply the principles and lessons from Open Educational Practices in our research context, to replicate the benefits observed from OEP in our teaching and

learning environment, including “greater external engagement. . .new partnerships, better relationships with existing agencies, new levels of understanding about collaborative working, improved dissemination, networking and learning opportunities” (McGill *et al.*, 2013, p. 8).

Our engagement with Open Educational Practices can bring both practical lessons and an enduring cultural shift to support these research interactions. As an example of a practical lesson from such collaborations, a recent study of open educational partnerships (between higher education institutions and community organizations in Scotland) concluded that

the evidence emerging from what is now a sequence of diverse partnership developments is that these relationships enable each OER project to be more than simply robust development of content, but also a way of facilitating use by actors in the network (Cannell & Macintyre, 2014, p. 5).

As an example of a longer-term cultural shift in these partnership relations, the same study noted the growing awareness of the importance of integrating “processes of identification and co-construction of content with context-specific understanding of social relationships and networks”.

Conclusions

These examples of our initial work show the potential for a deeper integration of our engagements in Open Educational Practices as elements of our institutional strategy, with more to come. We have been particularly encouraged by recent reports of similar impacts noted at other institutions: “Evidence suggests that engaging with OER and open practices more broadly has led to a reconsideration of strategy, policy, processes and practice” and that many OEP projects were able to “align their work with key strategic agendas, such as widening participation, employability, or flexible curriculum approaches” (McGill *et al.*, 2013, p. 8).

Kwantlen Polytechnic University’s roots as a community college (pre-2008), created to increase access to the fastest growing region in British Columbia, continue with our expanded vision: to be an “open” institution, accessible to all learners while focused on serving our geographical region. With some exceptions, admission is still open to all high school graduates, with various pathways of qualifying studies. There are still, however, many un-met needs, especially among learners with time and other constraints, and it is clear that simply offering more of our past teaching models and infrastructure will not suffice for us to meet these diverse demands.

Instead, new and innovative approaches to curriculum, learning resources, outcomes-based assessment, the recognition of prior learning, and judicious use of technology will be needed, to enrich the learner experience and to meet the needs of traditional and non-traditional and adult learners (and in addition to improve the cost-effectiveness of our educational methods). Open Educational Practices have the potential to help us meet these needs, in ways that also address “the social, cultural and material barriers to participation in learning” (Cannell & MacIntyre, 2014).

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