

Transforming the Knowledge Commons: Faculty-Librarian Collaborations that Advance Open Educational Practices, Student Agency, and Equity

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Background

For eight semesters between spring 2018 and fall 2022, I collaborated with a course instructor to integrate open educational practices, transitioning from assigning “disposable assignments” (aka research papers) to designing renewable assignments involving Wikipedia editing across two undergraduate classes, ‘LGBTQ Media Representation’ and ‘Technology and Culture’.

Defining open educational practices (OEP)

Open educational practices (OEP) are part of the broader open education movement and encompass “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” (Cronin, 2017). OEP also has “a social justice orientation – caring about equity, with openness as one way to achieve this” (Bali, 2017).

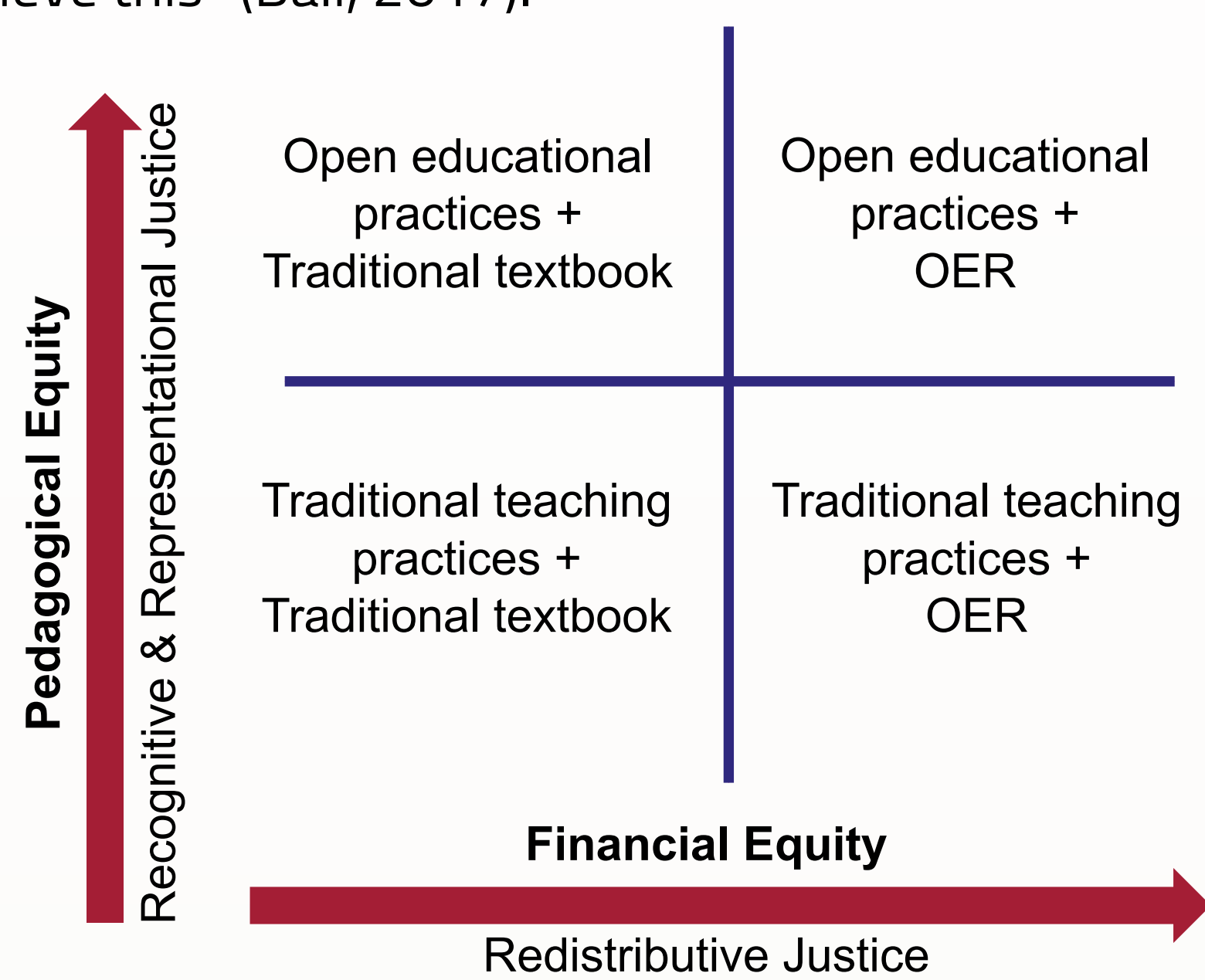


Figure 1. OEP matrix, adapted from Miceli (2022)

OEP challenges us to think beyond just redistributive justice and making sure students can access course materials, to thinking about recognitive and representational justice in order to expose students to diverse perspectives and allow their voices to be heard (Lambert, 2018).

Renewable assignments as OEP

Renewable assignments, unlike “disposable assignments” (Wiley, 2013), challenge the idea that students must passively consume knowledge in a Freirean banking model sense and, instead, encourage students to actively participate and contribute to the larger knowledge commons.

	Student creates an artifact	The artifact has value beyond supporting its creators learning	The artifact is made public	The artifact is openly licensed
Disposable assignments	Yes	No	No	No
Authentic assignments	Yes	Yes	No	No
Constructionist assignments	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Renewable assignments	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Figure 2. Wiley & Hilton's (2018) *Criteria Distinguishing Different Kinds of Assignments*

Wikipedia as a site of praxis



Wikipedia is based on ideas of openness and collaboration. The community of Wikipedians demonstrates to students how knowledge is constructed and made accessible in open systems.

‘Art+Feminism’ Wikipedia edit-a-thons hosted by Temple University Libraries are what initiated the faculty-librarian collaboration as the course instructor sought input on designing assignments that would engage her students in the events.

Over time, Wikipedia assignments iterated from small, one-offs to semester-long projects where students enhanced or created Wikipedia articles by choosing from an instructor/librarian-approved topic list. Students also conducted original research, met with the librarian, participated in peer-review, and completed how-to edit Wikipedia modules scaffolded to connect with course topics, like access to information, power and representation in online spaces, and intellectual property in the digital era.

End-of-semester tasks included debriefing with the librarian and writing a reflection essay plus a letter to future students about the overall experience.

Wikipedia activity ideas

- Add citations or lists of ‘further readings’ to articles
- Link content to external sources
- Link content to other Wikipedia articles
- Edit or translate existing articles
- Create and write new articles
- Add Wikimedia content to articles
- Upload public domain or CC-licensed content to Wikimedia

Lessons learned

- ✓ Scaffolded projects let students practice their contributions to Wikipedia in a supportive space and fostered critical engagement with course content.
- ✓ Student anxieties about subject matter expertise had to be addressed early.
- ✓ Students saw their work as part of a broader conversation and community.
- ✓ Libraries need to frame “open” as more than just textbook affordability.

Tapping into existing infrastructures

The course instructor took advantage of WikiEdu’s training library of online modules for students to complete, plus WikiEdu’s Dashboard tool which helped her track projects and student progress over a semester.

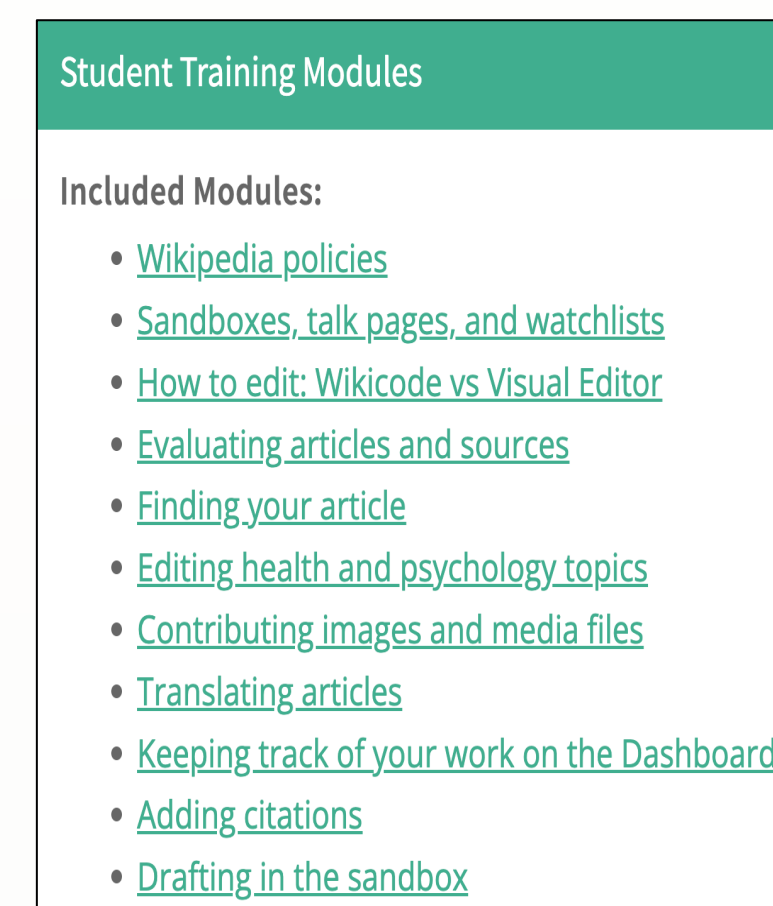


Figure 3. WikiEdu training modules

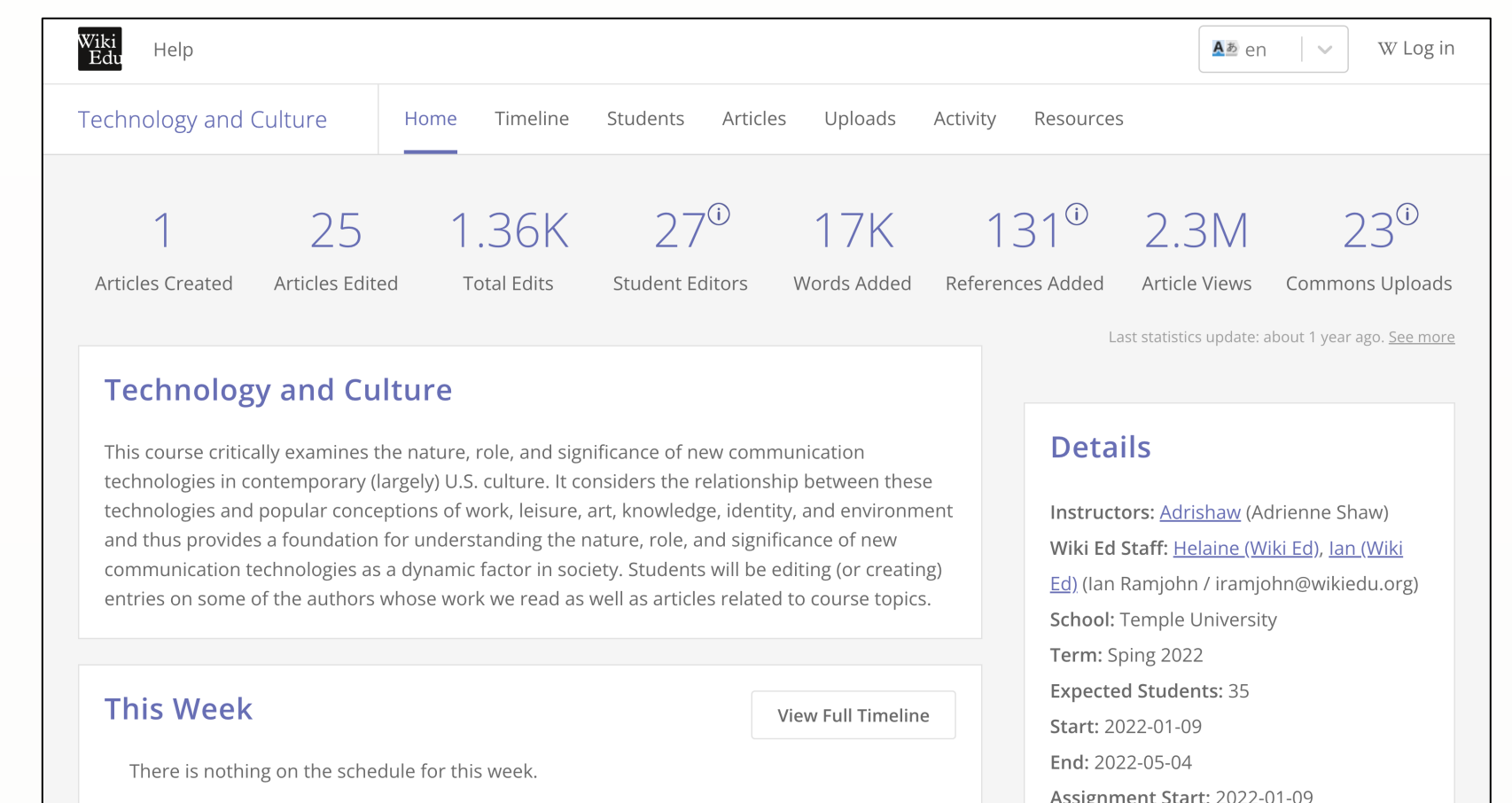


Figure 4. WikiEdu Dashboard tool (dashboard.wikiedu.org)

Student feedback

In both in-class debriefing sessions and end-of-semester written reflections, students commented on the “unlike anything I’ve ever done before” aspect, describing feelings of pride and substantiality in the work they contributed:

“Compared to other assignments I have had in the past, this one felt far more fulfilling, knowing my hard work was actually going to be seen and appreciated by real people beyond our classroom.”

Other students articulated their contributions in terms of their identities, of making visible what was once invisible:

“As a Hispanic woman, I feel a responsibility to contribute information from a perspective that is lacking within the overall collaborative space. I can use Wikipedia to showcase how fun research can be.”

Of course, not everyone thought editing Wikipedia was a great experience. Some students mentioned struggling with “backend procedures and intricate details of editing.”

Questions asked during debriefing sessions:

- How has editing Wikipedia changed the way you think about the site?
- How has editing Wikipedia informed your use of outside sources?
- How has your overall use of Wikipedia changed throughout the term?
- Will you continue to make contributions to Wikipedia?

Wikipedia assignment best practices

- Start small, scaffold, and iterate over time
- Identify Wikipedia articles that could be improved upon
- Build teaching how to edit and use Wikipedia’s platform into course
- Discuss the use and role of sources
- Challenge students to reflect on their own information privilege
- Consider including discussions on Copyright and Creative Commons
- Consider how issues of (in)visibility, (mis)representation, bias, and mis/disinformation intersect with the course’s subject matter
- Focus on the overall process more than the end product; include reflections
- Consider having students write letters to future students about experience
- Offer options to students who do not want their work to be public

Ways to engage faculty and students

Promote OEP via your library’s outreach initiatives and events:

- Host events like edit-a-thons, transcribe-a-thons or Wikidata meetups around a central theme, emphasizing share culture
- Coordinate events with Open Education Week, Open Access Week, Public Domain Day, etc.
- Emphasize OEP and renewable assignments in any OER incentive programs
- Establish a community of practice around the topic of OEP
- Partner with campus stakeholders (e.g. Teaching & Learning Centers)

To find out more

Scan the QR code for more details from De Voe & Shaw’s (2021) chapter, “‘Yeah, I Wrote that!’: Incorporating Critical Information Literacy to Build Community Inside and Outside of Wikipedia”.

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