Creating equitable access: using OER for socially just educational leaders

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate ways in which educator preparation programs can influence educator and administrator support of Open Education Resources (OER). OER is still not used as widely as the researchers would like, even though it was introduced in the year 2002 (Bliss and Smith, 2017). While it is rarely used to a large extent, it is especially lacking in K-12 schools. By introducing OER to educator candidates (including future principals) in their own programs, they may be supportive of OER and invest in them when they work in schools.

Design/methodology/approach – The research was conducted when an OER project was required in educator preparation programs. Two classes totaling 27 students engaged in a group project, creating OER materials and receptacles over the course of the semester.

Findings – Research showed that educator candidates were in favor of using OER thoroughly. Through building their own OER resources, educator candidates understood the importance of creating socially just and equitable learning environments, aligning with diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, a project like this has not been researched before. This research supports the idea that usage of OER and investment in it should happen for all educator candidates (teachers and administrators).

Keywords Social justice, Open educational resources, Educator preparation, Open access

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Researchers of Open Educational Resources (OER) have various definitions of what open educational resources mean, but they agree that it relates to providing shared educational materials with the ability to be remixed and reused in ways needed by educators (Ren, 2019; Baas *et al.*, 2019; Pounds and Bostock, 2019). Scholars introduced OER to the public over 20 years ago, with hopes of it becoming mainstream practice in educational institutions. With the idea of making education accessible to more students, advocates of OER stressed ways in which to use it. With officials of K-12 education spending more than $3bn a year on digital content and more than $9bn a year on K-12 content (Van Allen and Katz, 2020, p. 211), OER is not as used as it could be, and progress of OER use has been slow. Educators use it according to their own knowledge. They use OER superficially, such as in providing students with pdfs of articles or books. Administrators

who use OER do so with a vague understanding of its benefits. Whether it is due to not understanding OER legally or not fully understanding the intricacies of OER, students and educational institutions are not benefitting in the best way possible. One way to change starts with properly teaching educational candidates about OER. That took place in two education classes taught by the authors.

The first author worked at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) for that past 13 years. Out of those 13 years, 10 years were spent teaching at a small, private, liberal arts PWI in the southeast, where she was one of five African American faculty members. The first author taught multicultural education to a combination of undergraduate and graduate level students. Some of the students were teachers and others were assistant principals, seeking higher-level administrative positions. The majority of educator candidates spoke of securing positions in somewhat affluent, predominantly white schools. Half of the educator candidates already worked in affluent, predominantly white schools. Teaching diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) within social justice had its challenges, but also its rewards. Using open educational resources (OER) and teaching students ways in which to incorporate DEIB was one method of teaching multiculturalism, especially to students who may not have felt that it was needed for the schools in which they worked. The first authors' teaching philosophy centered on cultural responsiveness, social constructivism and authentic leadership. Using those areas, the first author taught DEIB within OER.

The second author spent the majority of her higher education career teaching at small, private, liberal arts, PWIs as well. She spent her time in the northwest, where she was also one out of a small number of African American faculty. The second author's role was to teach preservice school administrators ways in which to lead inclusively in a community focused way. The second author's students were doctoral-level students. The majority of them wanted to become K-12 administrators or serve in higher roles, and many already served in affluent, predominantly white schools, while others served in racially and economically diverse schools. Learning OER allowed them to understand the relationship between OER, equity and access, although many of them already had an understanding of DEIB and social justice at the doctoral level. The second author's teaching philosophy centers on critical theory, adult learning and social justice. In this article, the authors use the term *educator candidate* to describe both teacher licensure candidates, as well as principal licensure candidates.

Together, the two authors realized that they faced many challenges during those times at the small, liberal arts, private schools, but one area proved most challenging: Helping educator candidates understand ways in which DEIB, as well as OER, connected. For the authors, being African American women professors in a college where very few looked like them meant that they had to be careful with how they discussed the importance of DEIB in K-12 schools. Using OER as an assignment proved to be the best way in which to accomplish their goals.

For educator candidates to remain conscious of what it means to be equity focused, they must have some understanding of issues surrounding equity in schools. Without it, an educator preparation program (EPP) will have to spend a considerable amount of time covering equity and social justice (McKenzie *et al.*, 2008). Our programs centered themselves on components of DEIB: social justice, equity and access. The students in our program already had prior knowledge of social justice and equity focused education; therefore, introducing OER as a component of equity education did not require a large amount of introductory teaching. We prepared educator candidates (teachers and future principals) to

understand OER and DEIB by having them prepare a project in which they used OER and DEIB, practically.

Social justice education
There are a few educative factors analyzed to understand inequitable practices in K-12 schools, one being intentionality (Gregory *et al.*, 2017). Whether it is ensuring that curriculum plans, materials and experiences are intentionally equitable or not, the way in which a student learns via educational materials may have bearing on how a student performs. However, other experts believe that intentionality has no bearing on performance outcomes (Gooden and O'Doherty, 2015; Carter *et al.*, 2015). Regardless of one's intentions, preparing teaching and learning materials that are nonbiased and anti-racist can lead to equitable practices, such as using OER. The global pandemic has also exposed systemic and systematic inequities within pre K-12 schools (Engzell *et al.*, 2021; Haelermans *et al.*, 2022).

However, there are some additional issues. The problem with the use of the term "social justice" and "inclusiveness" is that either others broadly define in policies and organizational statements, or they do not use it at all. Therefore, the work of dismantling oppressive practices in schools by educational leaders rarely see completion (or get started) (Celoria, 2016). Carlisle *et al.* (2006, p. 56) worked to define social justice within the field of education as "the conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups." Within critical theory of social justice education, Foster encouraged leaders to see the world around them and consider ways in which to change them instead of remaining complacent:

> School leadership programs must prepare new leaders to critically inquire into the taken-for-granted structures and norms that often pose insurmountable barriers for many students' academic success. (Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy, 2005, p. 204)

In this article, we take that a step further by looking at the ability of OER to challenge normativity within education, by having educational candidates create OER projects for their future schools:

> The present ferment over this new conception of leadership provides an opportunity to reconsider within a social justice discourse what it means to lead in schools where student learning [. . .] is the heart of the work. (Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy, 2005, p. 209)

Also, school districts that educate the largest number of minority students tend to receive less state and local money than districts with a small number of minority. This equates to less money for resources and materials. In this case, OER may have positive effects on student learning and creating social justice educational environments.

At the root of preparing educators to be socially just and inclusive leaders in the 21st century would be their ability "to assist in the dismantling of structures of power by critiquing the ideologies that keep the structures in place" (Brookfield, 2018, p. 53). OER enables the deconstruction of inequitable practices in schools, with educators being readily equipped to use methods like OER.

Definition of open education resources
OERs are owned and shared by experts and can be freely used by others. Without the 5Rs: retain, reuse, revise, remix or redistribute (Wiley, 2014), OER does not apply to certain materials, which can confuse educators if the resource appears accessible and usable. Because of the confusion and generality of the words within OER, there is not always

agreement on what OER is and how it can be used (Mishra, 2017). A clearer definition of OER by Van Allen and Katz (2020) is:

> [. . .] learning materials that are openly licensed, which means the copyright holder has published the material on the internet under a Creative Commons license (CC) that allows others to retain, reuse, revise, remix, or redistribute (the 5RS) these materials (p. 210).

Open educational practices (OEP) allows for components of OER to take place. Viewing education as a something opposite of the banking method (Freire, 1970), OEP takes the perspective of creating an environment where a student can explore, encourage their curiosity and learn with the guidance of the teacher. Principals who embrace OEP can create educational environments where teachers embrace OER as well. Therefore, it is important that principals, as well as teachers, know OER is and how to use it.

The project

In the graduate courses, the authors introduced students to OER. The first author taught an undergraduate and graduate student education course called Learners in Context (see Appendix 1). The course focuses on multiculturalism within the world and schools. The students of the course are a mix of future teachers, and current teachers transitioning to principalship. The second author taught a graduate course titled Adult Development and Learning (see Appendix 2). This course, geared toward principal educators and community leaders, focused on aspects of learning, with components of diversity and inclusion. Because both of these courses focused on multicultural education and aspects of diversity in education (such as learning), both authors assigned OER as projects to help students understand ways in which OER satisfies DEIB within schools. For Learners in Context, students learned ways to create inclusive classrooms for K-12 students and their families, and OER was their final project. For Adult Development and Learning, students learned ways to create inclusive environments among teachers and community members. For both courses, students learned about different categories of DEIB, such as race, class, gender, religion, ability/ disability, location, sex, language, age and more. Including books and articles by scholars such as Stephen Brookfield, Paulo Freire, Maxine Greene, Geneva Gay and Lisa Delpit, coupled with videos by educators, helped students understand how to incorporate aspects of DEIB, practically.

The authors designed the projects based on the #GoOpen platform in their respective states (Oregon and North Carolina), critical theory (Greene, 1988; Freire, 1998) and cultural responsiveness within schools (Gay, 2002). While some students planned to work in affluent, predominantly white schools, other students worked in racially and economically diverse school settings. However, all students needed to understand DEIB and ways in which OER could help create more accessible and inclusive learning environments. All students also needed to understand that simply because a child attended an affluent school did not mean that the child had access to all resources needed for learning. Therefore, OER remains necessary for all students, regardless of class.

Using the #GoOpen concept, the authors charged educator candidates with creating an OER project to use in their schools of choice. The first author charged her students to create an OER that they would want to upload to #GoOpen; however, featuring the project on #GoOpen remained optional. The second author required her students to use #GoOpen. Student groups needed to create an OER project based on at least four categories of diversity: class/socioeconomic status, race, gender, religion, ability/disability, language, geography, sexuality and more. Principal candidates groups

were to create resources based on how they would use it in a workshop to teach their
educators ways to use OER. Teacher candidate groups were to create an OER lesson for
their grade level classrooms.

The action component of the OER course deliverable required the candidates to share
their projects to the rest of the class; for the second author's classroom, an additional
requirement charged students to openly license the resource in the OER Commons for
others to access. To set the context of this deliverable, making it relevant and in
alignment with national objectives, the second author provided the students with a link
to the U.S. Department of Education and Office of Educational Technology website for a
resource guide on OER for school districts. The #GoOpen District Launch Packet was
organized across learning, teaching, leadership, assessment and infrastructure.
Educator candidates needed to prove proficiency in technology and in understanding
OER's effect on an entire school staff (i.e. teaching, staff, librarians, families and
students).

For both projects, the students completed the projects in one semester, as it was
manageable, especially in groups of three to four. Each student group had to make their
projects relatable, based on their positions (principal or teacher) and incorporate discussion
about using the 5R's. The second author's student groups also had to choose one of the
following options for carrying out their project:

- *Option A*: Develop a plan and presentation (use Google Docs for creating your plan)
  for launching the #GoOpen movement in one's chosen educational setting (Use the
  five phases from U.S. DOE as guiding questions to formulate a plan); or

- *Option B*: Using OER Commons, create a resource in the OER Resource Builder with
  Open Author (i.e. choice of resource, lesson or module builder). License the resource
  and share the resource in the OER Commons.

For both authors, students have to submit a self-assessment of their learning skills, as well
as a narrative evaluation of the assignment. The evaluation was not a part of their grade,
but for the faculty to assess skills learned and critical learning achieved. The evaluation also
allowed faculty to understand the students understanding of DEIB and OER.

Project outcomes
Each student group incorporated lessons and activities that related to their own skills and
hobbies for the projects. The authors wanted creativity and minimal restrictions for these
projects. Lessons and activities created by the groups involved components such as music
playing, acting out scenarios, creative writing and craft making, along with readings and
detailed instructions for carrying out grade level lessons. Feedback within the class centered
on the 5R's so that each student understood ways to make OER's mirror them. While class
discussion was lively among the students, their evaluations helped us, as faculty,
understand what they really learned about OER. Statements from the students were honest
and telling. One teacher candidate stated:

> The project made me understand privilege better because I had to think about what some of my
> students don't have.

Another teacher candidate wrote, in his evaluation:

> At first, I thought this class was all about complaining, but the project was good. My group had to
> redo our lessons a few times because it didn't work for a category like gender. I understand a little
> better how some students are left out of learning.

One principal candidate mentioned:

> I really liked the OER project. It gave me a chance to think differently about how my school can be more inclusive to students. This would be a good project for my school.

Many groups had to revise their OER projects because they were not accessible, or difficult to remix. Other students mentioned enjoying the fact that they were able to include things that they liked into their OER projects. As faculty, we realized that many students saw OER as bland and generic before they created their projects. However, not all students fully understood the need for DEIB and OER. As the principal candidate mentioned, he felt that the entire talk about DEIB and accessibility was not as urgent as the faculty felt, yet he recognized the value in critically thinking about creating inclusive and accessible lessons. OER allowed him and his group members to see the value in considering access when creating OER. Another principal candidate recognized the ability to remix lessons when she stated the following:

I liked see the different projects. I can use some of these and make them my own.

Projects, such as OER, can support DEIB and social justice by "addressing systemic/structural roots of injustice" (Bali *et al.*, 2020, p. 13). The OER project allowed students to think practically about diversity and accessibility within learning.

While there are noted practices of transformative activities across the OER activities, the degree to which the assignments addressed economic, cultural and political injustice can be improved (Bali *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). By having students complete the assignment over the course of a year, where two semesters focus on DEIB and social justice, students would be able to learn more about the different aspects of DEIB in K-12 schools, economically and politically.

In reflecting on the assignment, the authors allowed the students space to create with minimal requirements. However, designing a deliverable in reverse allowed the students time to reflect on what knowledge sources they chose and why, as they learned the course content. Sharing the deliverables as a presentation at the end of the course was a requirement of the assignment; however, students were encouraged to share their projects with colleagues at their own schools as well. For students who did not yet work at schools (the undergraduate students), they were encouraged to share their project with their principal supervisors once they began their internships.

The authors did notice that understanding the significance of DEIB and OER differed between the undergraduate and graduate students. Because the graduate educational candidates currently worked in schools, they understood the connection between the two faster than the undergraduate students did. Since the undergraduate students had no experience with DEIB within schools, the impact of the assignment proved insignificant. This project might be useful for undergraduate educational candidates during their student teaching year.

The educator candidates also reported in their individual process reflections that the publishing options for those who sit outside of mainstream institutions could prove accessibility challenged. Bali and colleagues (2020) mentioned Open Learner Patchbook, Open Pedagogy Notebook and Domain of One's Own (DoOO) as resources that created platforms for broader and more equitable access. In fact, the DoOO "aims at empowering students by having institutions offer students their own web domain" (p. 10). The educator candidates that had an opportunity to understand equitable activism via OER were able to understand how to serve their colleagues, students and families.

Conclusion
OER, created in the early 2000s, continues to make education equitable, accessible and more justice oriented. It has taken over two decades for OER to gain traction in schools, yet does

not get widely used as one would hope. For various, yet legitimate reasons, educators and administrators appear weary about using OER due to misunderstandings and lack of assistance; however, some districts have invested in learning more about it. To increase the use of OER and help future educators and educational leaders become more at ease with it, the authors created an OER project where educator candidates were the ones to create open access resources for their future schools. This placed OER directly into administrator and educator hands, the ones who needed to understand it in order to advocate for it and invest in it. By doing this, educator candidates "reimagine their agency" (Van Allen and Katz, 2019, p. 318) as inclusive, transformative educators. While OER often focuses on teachers using it in the classroom, principals understanding the concept can help ensure the use of OER in their schools, this promoting diversity and inclusion.

While challenging in the beginning, the authors found OER to be a beneficial option for equitable and socially just learning. OER provides ways to educate students, make teaching resources easier to find and help educators and leaders create a learner-centered environment that can also extend to families. The authors suggest using OER projects in various education programs. As future educators and administrators understand better how OER can benefit learning, they are more apt to use it regularly and invest in professional development resources around OER.

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Appendix 1. DEIB and OER Project for EDUC 122/522

Education122/522
Learners in Context
Undergraduate and Graduate Course

EDUCATION 122/522COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces diversity issues and potential implications for 21st century teaching and learning. After an exploration of their personal cultural context, students will explore diversity issues of race/ethnicity, language, gender, socio-economic status, age and development, exceptionalities, religions and family/community structures. Field experiences will connect culturally responsible teaching practices with various aspects of diversity. Students will also be introduced to School Improvement Profiles (SIP) and the interdependency of context and SIP relevance. *Graduate students (522) will submit an additional project.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Gollnick, D.M. and Chinn, K. (2016). Multicultural education in a pluralistic society, 10th edition. Pearson.

*Articles and videos will be available on our course website:

FINAL COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

For your final assignment, your group will create an OER project for your school. Your group will decide if the project is for a classroom (teacher candidate group) or a school (principal candidate group). Based on aspects of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging that we covered over the course of the semester, create an OER lesson that could benefit various players: students, families, and additional educators. Be sure to consider the purpose of OER and its relation to DEIB. Your classmates will "try out" your project and provide feedback. *Publishing on #GoOpen is optional.

Areas to consider:

- Does the project include accessible lessons for various groups of students, according to categories of DEIB? *Choose at least four categories to cover(ex. Ability/disability, gender, and race).
- Does the project align with the 5Rs? If not, explain why. *Note: this is your first project, so I do not expect this to be perfect. Do your best.
- Can the project be used by others?
- Are there any barriers? If so, what are they? What might be a solution?

Appendix 2. EDLL Doctoral Syllabus

THE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEPARTMENT aims to be a rigorous environment where students, faculty, and staff are open to being uncomfortable/challenged/wrong. By choosing to be in this space, we learn to practice leadership as collective discourse, inquiry, and action designed to disrupt the status quo, make structural disparities visible, and create fairness in opportunities and outcomes for minoritized students, families, and communities across the P-20 spectrum.

EDLL 709 Adult Development and Learning

CATALOG / COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Understanding how people and organizations develop and learn is centrally important for organizational leaders, whether learning is about existing or new knowledge. In this course students will explore a variety of theories related to adult learning including transformational learning, critical and feminist theories, distributed cognition, and social practice theory. Students will apply these theories to their own experiences as learners, and to learning in the organizational settings in which they work.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
Students in this course will:
   (1) Demonstrate application of adult development theories to adult learning in educational settings
   (2) Gain working knowledge of, and demonstrate ability to apply, at least one theory of adult learning to their work setting or dissertation research
   (3) Be able to analyze and reflect upon your practice in working with adults using at least one critical perspective
   (4) Demonstrate awareness of their own adult development relative to leadership

REQUIRED TEXT READINGS:
Brookfield, S. (2005). *The power of critical theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Other readings as assigned and distributed in class.

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You are encouraged to search the following website for information regarding Lewis & Clark College's policies regarding student life:
http://graduate.lclark.edu/student_life/handbook/college_policies/
Disability Services Statement: *If you have a disability that may impact your academic performance, you may request accommodations by submitting documentation to the Student Support Services Office in the Albany Quadrangle (503-768-7192). After you have submitted documentation and filled out paperwork there for the current semester requesting accommodations, staff in that office will notify me of the accommodations for which you are eligible.*
APA 6th Edition: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/

COURSE SCHEDULE:

This syllabus and schedule are subject to change at the instructor's discretion, in response to student learning or extenuating circumstances. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to ask about announcements and assignments given while you were absent.

Sept 13: Introductions & Forum
Course Introduction
Contextualizing Adult Development
Jigsaw Reading
OER/Podcasting Seminars at the Library

Oct 11: Traditions of Critical Analysis that Frame Adult Education Theory
Transformative and Transformational Learning
Review historical shifts in the transition to adulthood, the major themes and tasks of adulthood, and major theories of adult development. We will apply theories to practice in educational settings and discuss the link between development and developmental theory and learning. During this class we will examine transformative and transformational learning, including the theoretical roots and practical applications of these seminal concepts in adult learning and development.

Nov 11: Critical Adult Learning
Cohort plans the day beginning with Stephen Brookfield!

Dec 13: Critical Adult Learning
In this class, we will explore critical social frameworks relative to adult learning and their application to educational leadership.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:
Participants will be required to complete the following assignments:

1. **Critical Adult Learning Incidents (20%):** Each session, we will complete writing activities that you will be required to submit into the Google classroom drop box as a running word document journal. The goal of the journal is for you to demonstrate your engagement with the readings, to apply concepts from the readings to your own development and educational practice, and to help you build towards your presentation and paper at the end of the course. I will be collecting the journals at the end of the course.

2. **Presentation (35%):** Presentations will be determined by which deliverable option is chosen. For instance, Option 1 the presentation will be the actual Podcast that we will serve as the listeners. Option 2, will be a presentation of the OER deliverable and Option

3 – the paper will consist of presenting on the components of the paper as described below.

3. **Final Deliverable (45%):** Choose from one of the following options:

    ▪ *Option 1: Podcast*

    Written Components: Podcast Process Summary, Podcast Script and **Podcast Outline** will be posted to the EDLL 709 Google Classroom**. Required: Facilitated workshop/PD at the Library**

    Podcast Process Summary: (5-7 pgs.) will be submitted by each participant. The Podcast Process Summary will be a critical reflection writing describing the process leading up to and during the Podcast. Remember we are learning about facilitating the learning of adults through the lens of critical adult theory and other critical theories that center race and incorporates other social realities that intersect.

    Podcast Outline: includes 1) Topic; 2) Learning Goals; 3) Intended audience and; 4) Explanation of overall sequence of events of the Podcast. This could be the Agenda.

    Podcast Script: See criteria below. Must include each role.

    ▪ *Option 2:* OER deliverable to be used in the Principal License Program at the GSEC. **Required: Facilitated workshop/PD at the Library**

    Read articles to learn about *#Go Open, Open Educational Resources, Creative Commons, Meta-tagging, and Cloud based Applications;*
    Create an account in OER Commons and join the OER Commons for L&C;
    Determine which activity you will complete from the below choice board.

Option 1	Develop a plan/presentation (use Google Docs for creating your plan) for launching #GoOpen in your education setting (Use the five phases from US DOE as guiding questions to formulate a plan). Next, share and openly license your plan in the OER Commons
Option 2	Using OER Commons, create a resource in the OER Resource Builder with Open Author (i.e., choice of resource, lesson, or module builder). License the resource and share the resource in the OER Commons. Complete the Self-assessment Rubric (in the Google Classroom). The assignment is to self-assess the project you have created.

▪ ***Option 3:*** Paper

Write a 10-12 page paper applying a critical Andragogy Framework perspective on adult development, adult learning or adult education to a former, current or envisioned adult learning opportunity in your school community.

Grades will be based on the following scale:
A=93-100 A-=90-92 B+=87-89 B=83-86 B-=80-82 C+=77-79 C=73-76 C-=70-72
Anything below 70 is considered failing.

For the final assignment, the rubric scales aligns to grades as follows:
   A range = 3.3-4.0 average rating
   B range= 2.8 - 3.29 average rating
   C range= 2.0-2.79 average rating
   F range= Below 2.0 average rating

About the authors
Sydney Richardson is Associate Professor and Department Chair of Leadership Studies and Adult Education at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Her work centers on counter-narratives in qualitative research, multicultural leadership and diversity and justice within education. She received her MA in English and African American Literature from North Carolina A&T State University and her PhD in Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Sydney Richardson is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: sdrichardson09@gmail.com

Jacqueline Roebuck Sakho is Assistant Professor in the Master of School Administration program at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. She brings a critical approach to her work that is informed by intentionally living in the margins. Dr Sakho works to establish community-centered educational leadership as a type of leadership preparation and practice designed to combat interlocking systemic and structural inequities. She received her MA in Conflict Transformation from Eastern Mennonite University and her PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from Duquesne University.