

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Publications and Research

LaGuardia Community College

---

2022

### Your Discomfort Is Valid: Big Feelings and Open Pedagogy

Liz Pearce

*Linn-Benton Community College*

Silvia L. Lin Hanick

*CUNY La Guardia Community College*

Amy R. Hofer

*Linn-Benton Community College*

Lori Townsend

*University of New Mexico*

Michaela Willi Hooper

*OER Consultant*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/lg\\_pubs/173](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/lg_pubs/173)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

# **Your Discomfort Is Valid: Big Feelings and Open Pedagogy**

**Liz Pearce**

pearcel@linnbenton.edu  
Linn-Benton Community College  
Albany, Oregon

**Silvia Lin Hanick**

slinhanick@lagcc.cuny.edu  
LaGuardia Community College (CUNY)  
Long Island City, New York

**Amy Hofer**

hofer@linnbenton.edu  
Linn-Benton Community College  
Albany, Oregon

**Lori Townsend**

lt@unm.edu  
University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1627-0449>

**Michaela Willi Hooper**

michaela@taowebsites.com  
OER Consultant  
Eugene, Oregon  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6870-902X>

**ABSTRACT.** This article explores the affective reactions of 13 community college students engaged in an open pedagogy textbook creation project. The instructor and first author, a human development and family services faculty member and department chair at a community college in Oregon, received feedback from her students that the project impacted them differently than past learning experiences. Student engagement with research and the diverse personal experiences of their classmates fostered both personal challenges and growth. This article groups these experiences into themes and explores different theoretical lenses, including scaffolding (constructivism), transformative learning, threshold concepts and safe spaces/brave spaces. We discuss the support that students and faculty can use in similar learning situations, such as metacognition and cultural humility. Finally, we offer a visual

model that open educators can use and adapt to consider how to raise or lower the stakes of an open pedagogy assignment.

Keywords: open pedagogy; transformative learning; threshold concepts; brave spaces; cultural humility; open educational resources

*Received 12 April 2021 • Received in revised form 23 April 2022*

*Accepted 8 July 2022 • Available online 1 August 2022*

## **Introduction**

The practice of open pedagogy may evoke feelings of pride, discomfort, self-confidence, vertigo and more – both for students and for educators. This article will explore these affective dimensions of learning through theoretical lenses that illuminate the challenges and possibilities of open pedagogy. We, a group of five authors, rely on these learning theories to better understand the experience of discomfort, in particular, and to suggest some ways to scaffold open pedagogy assignments for student success. The authors understand our own identities as encompassing affiliations with both dominant (white, cisgendered, able-bodied, straight, middle class, with graduate degrees) and nondominant (Shoshone-Paiute, Taiwanese American, disabled, queer, women, first-generation American) groups in the US, with varying access to privilege across different contexts. As a result, we are especially interested in the link between open educational practices and equity.

For the purposes of this article, we define *open pedagogy* as a practice in which students are creators of openly licensed content for a real-world audience (Wiley, 2013; DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2017). More broadly, *open educational practices* are a spectrum of strategies that includes interaction with, or creation of, content that is not under all-rights-reserved copyright. An example of an open educational practice would be assigning students to read/watch open content as course materials (e.g., students read an openly licensed textbook). At the opposite end of the spectrum, open educational practices can extend conceptually into any pedagogy that enables student choices (e.g., students co-create the syllabus). At this end of the spectrum, the copyright/licensing status is less prioritised than the concept of *open* in the sense of student agency, inclusion and equity (DeRosa, 2020). Our working definition of open pedagogy is in the middle of this spectrum of open educational practices.

This group of authors strives to engage our students in our subject matter deeply enough that they not only comprehend and retain the material, but adjust and build new brain structures and pathways. Motivating student engagement and commitment can, however, be challenging. As instructors, we cannot control the multitude of structural barriers, past education and lived experiences that influence student engagement. We can, however, work toward a compassionate space for learning that is conducive to

engagement. We do this by iterating courses that provide meaningful opportunities for students to interact with, explore, practise and become proficient with the material.

Open pedagogy can be one way of building the kind of deep engagement necessary to activate a shift in identity – from novice to active member of a practitioner community. Students may develop the confidence to authentically participate in a discipline, gain the sociological imagination to connect their experience to wider societal currents, or resist dominant narratives by contributing their unique story. Still, guiding students through a shift in personal identity can be a challenging process.

This writing project began with Liz’s reflection on her first dive into teaching with open pedagogy in which students contributed to an open textbook for a course that they had taken in the past year. Along with exhilaration and a sense of purpose, students experienced emotional pain, feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability. In order to learn from the experience, Liz started a conversation with Michaela, the OER librarian at her college, which grew to include Amy, Oregon’s state-wide OER program director, then Lori and Silvia, both librarians with teaching and learning expertise. With the various backgrounds that the group brings to this discussion, there was a shared insight that emotional reactions to participation in open pedagogy assignments aren’t necessarily bad, but that perhaps there are ways to anticipate and prepare students for the affective impacts of deep learning.

Open pedagogy strategies may seem like extra work for faculty, but – as illustrated by the student reflections shared here – can lead to deep and transformative learning. Using both learning theories and student reflections from Liz’s class, this article will propose a range of strategies to understand and mitigate student discomfort when working in the open.

### **Affective Dimensions of the Project**

When Liz taught her Spring 2019 section of Contemporary Families in the United States, she was already motivated to create an open textbook that more completely met the learning goals of the course. She also wanted to create a text that would better represent the diverse group of students that she taught, and that contained topics most relevant to students, the consumers of the text. The project came to fruition after nearly two years of work with a virtual launch party in Winter 2021 for *Contemporary Families: An Equity Lens* (Pearce, 2020).

Liz had searched for openly licensed materials for this course for years before concluding that the course required a new text, with a differently positioned equity lens, that supported the course outcomes:

1. Using historical and contemporary examples, describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social and political institutions, result in discrimination.
2. Explain how difference is socially constructed.

3. Analyse ways in which the intersections of social categories such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability and age are related to difference, power and discrimination in the United States.

Authors of openly licensed textbooks, while striving to make knowledge more accessible, are not much more diverse than commercial textbook authors, especially with respect to racial demographics (Thiede, 2019). Liz fits this profile, identifying with intersectional female and gay identities, while also recognising her own privilege as a white, cis-gendered member of a family that has accumulated wealth over generations and a tenured faculty member. But she could make the access to content creation in this textbook more equitable by radically including student voices.

In the spring of 2019, Liz invited all students who had taken the course over the past year to participate in the open textbook project. Additional active recruiting of students from underrepresented groups aligned with Liz’s explicit value of considering multiple perspectives, identities and viewpoints. The resulting group of 13 students came from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and identities. Throughout this article, we will hear from nine of the students by name or pseudonym, per the permission that they granted: Alexis Castenada-Perez, Amy Huskey, Carla Medel, Cassie Cruze, Chris Byers, Wesley Sharp, Hannah Morelos, Julia Standbridge (pseudonym) and Helen Kammerer (pseudonym).

The feelings that came up for students, described in the following sections, show that deep learning was happening in Liz’s open pedagogy class and that there were emotional costs to students in the process. She groups her observations of these dimensions into five themes. Student feedback along these themes illustrates both discomfort and a sense of accomplishment as a result of participating in this project.

The following table describes how these themes manifested in student behaviours and responses.

Table 1  
*Affective Dimensions of Student Learning*

Theme	Characterised by:
Feelings of being undeserving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerns that their writing would be too biased, or not of academic quality, which resulted in not writing at all, or being reluctant to share writing with others</li> </ul>
Increased understanding of structural discrimination and their own roles within that structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Confrontation with ownership of white (and other) privilege</li> <li>● Conflict with close family members</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Being pushed beyond comfort zone and self-limiting boundaries</li> </ul>
Reliving of personal experiences, including trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Realisation that their experiences with injustice are not isolated and that there are systemic barriers to justice</li> <li>● Despair, depression, discouragement</li> <li>● Emotional labour performed by students from underrepresented groups to educate others about inequities</li> </ul>
Being motivated and optimistic about being resource creators of equity-based materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Realisation that, in contrast with writing papers just for one professor, or speaking up in small groups or in class, this book would impact many students</li> <li>● Validation of their viewpoints; validation of voice (especially for students in groups that have been underrepresented)</li> <li>● Pride in presentation of stories with people who ‘look like me’ (for students in less represented groups)</li> </ul>
Continually adapting to being in the unknown space of an open learning environment with an equity focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continuous assimilation and accommodation to a learning environment in which students are expected to be creators and in which an explicit value is to value all voices, particularly those that are underrepresented</li> <li>● Unsettled feelings about the flexible, constructivist environment (especially for students who excel in traditional environments)</li> </ul>

### **Interconnected Learning Theories**

Liz’s students responded to their discomfort in a variety of ways, some of which propelled them forward and others that obstructed their participation. As Liz observed and listened to them, she realised that she

could have anticipated or prepared for this likelihood in an open pedagogy project where students were given a broad range of choices. Her case suggested entry points into multiple interconnected learning theories that this group of authors uses to guide our teaching practices. The sections below provide a brief tour of the ways that we used these theories to inform our thinking about her open pedagogy assignment.

### ***Transformative Learning and Scaffolding***

Transformative learning is a theory to understand the affective responses of adult learners to changes in identity resulting from education. This is Michaela's area of expertise, especially as it relates to teaching in academic libraries (Willi Hooper & Scharf, 2016). This learning theory is closely related to both constructivism and threshold concepts, discussed below. Transformative learning helps us theorise about why an open pedagogy approach, particularly in the content areas of equity and family studies, may have amplified emotional reactions from Liz's students.

Jack Mezirow (1978) first used the term 'transformative learning' to describe learners interrogating, with others, what they encounter in the classroom, leading to a transformation of perspective. When a learning community grapples with the contrasts and contradictions between diverse personal experiences and a body of knowledge, new knowledge can be created and identities transformed. Rather than transmitting knowledge to students, an instructor facilitates a space for co-creating knowledge. Many educational researchers have built on and expanded Mezirow's theory, and noted similarities to other theories, including constructivism (Powell & Kalena, 2009) and Freire's emancipatory education (Taylor, 2008).

One of the most gripping original contributions to Liz's open textbook was the student contributors' descriptions of how the project irreversibly altered their personal identities and worldviews. This group of 13 students came from different backgrounds, and the act of working together in the community contributed to these transformations. This experience echoes the conditions and results characteristic of transformative learning. Wesley, a freshman, who frequently articulated viewpoints inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community during class discussions, described it this way:

This project has made me evaluate myself and my skills more deeply. Figuring out what I excel at and what I need to improve on. This project has also really strengthened my drive for emphasising equity into my advocacy work. I really hope that the work done on this project can ... inspire discussion and reflection in a world where those actions are deeply critical.

Chris, a white, millennial, future social worker who has worked through addictions, had developed a passion for understanding his own privilege, demonstrated by reading multiple scholarly

books and participating in several workshop series. Chris was extremely close to his parents and two living siblings. He had survived a great deal and was surprised to begin to view himself as privileged. Asked to reflect on his process midway through the project, Chris said:

I have a willingness to extend myself past the social norm and dive deeper into my journey, even if it means I might be perceived differently by people of the dominant culture, and maybe even those of other cultures as well. I have to continually be mindful of my social identity and how I may or may not be perceived when I explore this subject more deeply.... I have already received resistance in my journey, and, yes, it has been uncomfortable at times, but it hasn't deterred me in my motive to pursue justice. Looking back on my growth this past year, I have seen a scared little boy who thought he was a victim for a long time, to someone who has taken accountability for themselves and wants to utilise their knowledge to help.

The exhilaration of articulating new ideas was tempered by his family's response. His parents disagreed with his developing understanding of privilege. They told him he was being brainwashed. The disagreements were heated and emotional.

The open pedagogy seminar was a safe and brave place, as discussed in the section below. When Chris talked about the diminishing relationship with his family, Julia spoke up as well. Julia is a non-traditional, white, Human Services major parenting two young children who found herself developing a different belief system from her family of origin. She shared that her family was openly racist, and she had always felt as if she did not fit in. Chris's way of expressing himself was critical; he was a leader to students who were part of the dominant culture and lent a reinforcing voice to those who were members of underrepresented groups.

Vygotsky, the founder of social constructivism, introduced an additional concept that is relevant to this discussion: the zone of proximal development, or ZPD, and the related concept of scaffolding. In a nutshell, there is a gap between what learners can do and what they cannot yet do. Learners *can* accomplish what is in that gap (their zone of proximal development) but only with the support of others. In other words, the ZPD is where learning happens. When teachers provide appropriate support for learners to get to the next level, removing that support as it's no longer necessary, they're providing scaffolding (Powell & Kalena, 2009, p. 244). While Vygotsky focused on children, adults, too, will become frustrated if they are not sufficiently supported with challenging learning (Mariani, 1997).

Silvia has a vivid memory that illustrates the need for scaffolding. The first time she took her mother to Chipotle Mexican Grill, they spent their time in line chatting about nothing in particular. When they reached the first server, Silvia's mother was inundated with a series of choices: burrito, bowl, or

tacos? White rice or brown? Pinto or black? Chicken, steak, carnitas, barbacoa, sofritas, vegetables? Hot, medium, mild, or corn salsa? Sour cream? Cheese? Lettuce? Guacamole for an additional \$2.50? Totally overwhelmed by the unfamiliar ordering structure and the pressure to make decisions, Silvia's mother ended up with a meal that was not at all what she wanted. Many years – and a hundred burritos – later, Silvia's mother still refuses to order at Chipotle on her own, even though the choices and process are now routine. Thinking back to that moment, Silvia realises that there were so many ways to mitigate her mother's discomfort. They could have gone through the menu items in advance, visited outside of the busy lunch hour, or ordered online for pickup. Instead, the negative emotional experience lingered, hindering further skill mastery.

An example of effective scaffolding in Liz's open pedagogy course came up with Hannah. Hannah was less likely to speak up in class but submitted eloquent one-minute papers that integrated personal experience with academic concepts such as implicit bias and intersectionality. Hannah identified for herself that she wanted to be more confident in expressing her viewpoints and experiences for others. Working on this task in the supportive environment of this project's student cohort gave Hannah a safer place to practice. She said:

There were a few things that I faced that I had to challenge myself on. For example, speaking up in the group setting and sharing my thoughts and ideas, along with sharing what I have written and getting out of the perfectionist mindset.... Each week we met, there were always great discussions and feedback that helped me grow more insights and develop more understanding in how families and individuals are affected in different areas of their lives.... I felt like my ideas and opinions were valued, which helped me develop more of a voice and made me feel comfortable sharing.

Students' zones of proximal development are, of course, ever-shifting. In Liz's open pedagogy course, students' roles and foci were highly individualised through a learning plan (below and Appendix A). Furthermore, in an open pedagogy project, students go *beyond* existing knowledge to co-create new knowledge and ways of being. This requires instructors to be courageous and flexible, as they scaffold the learning experience *with* the students *as the class takes place* rather than from a set blueprint established beforehand. Transformative learning leaves space for not only the students, but *also the instructor* to be transformed.<sup>1</sup>

Mezirow describes the anxiety that learners experience as they ponder how to navigate their revised conceptual landscape following an epistemic shift (i.e. a change in ways of knowing; Dirkx et al., 2006). For example, students in this open pedagogy project experienced conflict with their families when

sharing their altered beliefs. As will be discussed in the section below on safe spaces and brave spaces, the emotionally charged nature of topics and experiences (especially related to families) varies from student to student and class to class. Dirkx felt that a ‘profound change in one’s cognitive, emotional, or spiritual way of being’ (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 133) was requisite for transformative learning and acknowledged that the more personally engaged a student was, the more likely they were to experience a range of emotions, from ‘fear, grief, loss, regret and anger’ to ‘joy, wonder and awe’ (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 132).

Guiding questions using transformative learning theory:

- How do open educators prevent the discomfort that obstructs student participation? If they do reach this point, how do we help them move forward?
- Hannah felt her ‘ideas and opinions were valued,’ which made her ‘feel comfortable sharing.’ What strategies do you have for scaffolding student ownership of expertise, student confidence and active listening in a respectful classroom?
- How do you provide structure to ameliorate the frustration caused by high-challenge learning while also enabling students to go *beyond* the learning intended by the teacher to create new knowledge?

### ***Threshold Concepts and Liminal Spaces***

When Amy talked with Liz about her open pedagogy course, she thought it sounded as if students were experiencing discomfort because they were in a liminal space. Liz’s students had taken her Contemporary Families course six months to a year before starting the open pedagogy project and likely were still integrating what they learned – and now they were writing textbook chapters for a wider audience. This would account for feeling unqualified for the assignment and highlights the essential need for scaffolding.

Amy brought the liminal space to the discussion and then reached out to Lori and Silvia because of their previous work together on threshold concepts for information literacy instruction (Hofer, Lin Hanick, & Townsend, 2019). Jan Meyer and Ray Land, the theorists who developed the threshold concepts approach, explain that entry into the liminal space happens when the learner’s concretely held beliefs or knowledge are challenged, and they do not ‘wish to change or let go of their customary way of seeing things’; staying in the liminal space suspends the learner in a ‘state of partial understanding’ (Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010, p. x). It is in this space, however, that we begin to integrate new knowledge, bringing about ‘a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world’ (O’Sullivan as cited in Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010, p. xiii). In the liminal space, we

confront what we don't know or think we know, and build up the courage to dismantle our incomplete or flawed understandings. Learning in the liminal space is often uncomfortable, unsettling and scary. Learning in the liminal space can also be exciting, inspiring and clarifying; challenging learning experiences, after all, can be both uncomfortable and rewarding. Or it can be frustrating, full stop.

Learning in the liminal space is less a light switch to be flipped on or off and more a voyage across an open sea. This is to say, learners do not move from unknowing to knowing in a binary. Instead, learners move toward understanding in fits and bursts, at different speeds, and achieve varied rates of success. Some learners traverse the liminal space quickly, catching a strong wind across calm waters. Others undertake a longer cruise, perhaps tangling with a squall, taking a break in the doldrums, or exploring interesting coves and bays, before arriving on a new shore of understanding. Some may never arrive, returning to their original launching point, settling in for an extended sail, or detouring to an unexpected destination.

Amy Huskey (student) described her learning process in a way that illustrates her experience in the liminal space:

The main way this course has challenged me was to scrutinise my own view of things. This requires a person to be open enough to admit that your current views might be wrong, so there is a level of humility that must be embraced while taking this course. This is never a comfortable experience because it is always much easier to coast through life with whatever makes you the most comfortable. Yet, change requires a certain level of discomfort, and I would say the point of these difference, privilege, power and discrimination<sup>2</sup> classes are to promote awareness and change.

While students are in the liminal space, oscillating between confusion and understanding, trying to grasp new concepts that are deeply connected to an academic discipline – that may be the exact moment when it would be very stressful to share your work in the open or turn around and teach a concept to someone else. A threshold concepts approach, then, suggests an explanation for why open pedagogy might require extra student support. So far, there is little published writing that connects the threshold concepts model to how students experience open educational practices.

For the purposes of this paper, though, the more relevant focus is the learning thresholds that *instructors* navigate as they experiment with open practices, supporting students by taking the affective dimensions of learning into account. In short, becoming an open educator, broadly defined as a teacher who uses open educational practices as described in our introduction, is itself a learning process, involving both epistemological and ontological shifts (epistemology refers to ways of knowing, and

ontology refers to ways of being).<sup>3</sup> For instructors, negotiating this liminal space toward open pedagogy is made more challenging by the uneven and shifting terrain of a still-developing field – one that encourages experimentation and learning out in the open, in front of an audience of unknown but potentially enormous size. And whatever pedagogy the educator chooses inevitably involves their students, who are particularly deserving of care when working in the open. To be successful, then, open pedagogy should both acknowledge and mitigate the challenges of working in the liminal space because transformative learning may be scary, and learners do not react to discomfort in the same way.

Guiding questions using the threshold concepts approach:

- In the threshold concepts approach, moving through the liminal space is both an intellectual and emotional experience. What are the cognitive skills your open assignment requires of students? What are the affective skills your open assignment requires of students?
- How can we, as current and future open educators, navigate the liminal space with our students?
- As a result of their work on the open textbook, Chris and Julia (quoted in the previous section) found ways to confront uncomfortable truths about their families; understandably, not all students may be prepared to do the same. How can open assignments foster ontological growth without penalising students who need to linger in the liminal space?

### ***Discomfort: Safe Spaces and Brave Spaces***

Once the group started talking about student discomfort – a common feeling in the liminal space – Lori made a connection with the concepts of safe spaces and brave spaces. These ideas are useful for differentiating between productive discomfort as opposed to the discomfort that gets in the way of learning by creating a threat, triggering a trauma, or burdening marginalised students with disproportionate emotional labour. Liz’s students were experiencing discomfort and sharing those feelings, so it was important to understand which type of discomfort was in play.

Arao and Clemens (2018) originated the concept of ‘brave spaces’ as a transformative recasting of the well-known and often-criticised ‘safe spaces’ approach. The ‘safe spaces’ technique emerged from social justice educational practices, where students and instructors gather to engage in challenging conversations about race/ethnicity, gender and other complex, risky and deeply personal issues. Arao and Clemens noticed that participants would often conflate *safe* with *comfortable* and therefore express frustration when the safe space also included challenge and discomfort. In their own work, they shifted away from the concept of safety to that of bravery in order to facilitate real engagement on social justice issues despite the personal discomfort that participants experienced.

Julia, the student introduced earlier who was unlearning her family's beliefs about racial identity, found that deep learning was productive, though neither safe nor comfortable. She said:

I have delved deep into privilege, specifically white privilege, and what it means to have that. There were a few weeks at the beginning of the term where I felt uncomfortable just existing, knowing that I hadn't even heard much about this concept before and the ways that it enriches my life and disadvantages people of colour's lives. With that discomfort, though, and with time passing and my own reflecting, I started to grasp it better and feel less guilt and more determination about what I would/could do with that uncomfortable feeling. Learning these substantial facts about the injustices existing around me is not always going to be comfortable, and neither is personal growth. All this to say that this term has been a messy process but a flourishing one.

While it is important for educators to recognise that discomfort might be an attribute of a productive learning process, it may also signal psychological processes that hinder learning. Taylor and Baker (2019) interrogate the idea that discomfort is an expected and normal part of the learning process. They find that some forms of discomfort are not productive but can signal internal states that will act as a hindrance to learning.

Taylor and Baker also explored the relationship between the concept of discomfort and dissonance, where two ideas, thoughts, or beliefs come into conflict. Dissonance is a common part of the learning process as students encounter new information and incorporate that new information into their existing understandings. Instructors may conflate the student experience of dissonance with that of discomfort. This conflation may cause instructors to mistake student discomfort that is the result of the violation of or threat to student safety for the productive discomfort that is a regular part of the learning process. Likewise, confusing the two might also lead instructors to fail to provide adequate support when students experience discomfort or to mistake discomfort as a learning goal in and of itself, as opposed to a potential sign that dissonance is occurring (Taylor & Baker, 2019).

Particular attention should be paid to discomfort expressed by students who are members of marginalised communities. Using a safe or brave space approach in conventional classes can result in these students feeling forced to share painful personal anecdotes or make arguments defending their own humanity in order to facilitate the learning of others (Verduzo-Baker, 2018). Lily Zheng, while a student at Stanford University, wrote that:

The ‘dialogue’ becomes a one-sided stream of narratives, trauma, critical theory and lived experiences going from the marginalised to the not-marginalised, a ‘brave’ space for privileged people to challenge their own preconceptions – and a miserable space for the marginalised people forced to do that labour of education. (Zheng, 2016)

Zheng’s anger is clear from the title of her article: ‘Why your brave space sucks.’

During the open pedagogy project, Liz observed that students who identified as belonging to underrepresented groups such as LGBTQ+, immigrant families, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, or Asian, spoke up often about their experiences and their interest in producing a textbook that would tell their stories in a more authentic and centred way. In contrast to a brave space that mined the experience of marginalised students for class content, Liz’s students seemed empowered to speak up in an environment where the stated mission was to centre these families in the textbook.

Carla, a 25-year-old Latina psychology major, researched and wrote about redlining, which was a new subject to her, and about housing for guest workers and immigrants, with which she had personal experience. Carla saw the writing project as an opportunity to push back against her marginalised status with a wider audience. She said:

The majority of my learning came simply from doing some research on just a few sections in the Housing chapter ... including the residential segregation in the Portland, Oregon area. Although most of my learning came from my own personal researching and writing process ... I am learning a lot because we are focusing on including people/topics that aren’t traditionally talked about because those who write our textbooks have left lots of things out. I believe that in the housing chapter which I worked on, families like mine are represented, which makes me extremely happy for future students like me to see themselves represented in their coursework.

Moreover, while this group of students was highly motivated to grapple with inequities, there were still knowledge gaps. Before class started one morning, several students excitedly talked about new scholarships and financial aid opportunities. Carla reminded the group that not all students are able to take advantage of these options. Nationality and immigration status, not just of the student but of family members, limit many students from applying. Students listened carefully to Carla, who included this perspective in her preface to the chapter ‘Real Laws, Real Families’ in *Contemporary Families: An Equity Lens*, writing:

Because of the privilege I have of being able to make it into higher ed and be a part of this project, I wanted to use that to write about people like me, my parents and my family so that more children don't see themselves as an 'other,' a little section of the text that no one really goes over. Things haven't been and aren't fair for those who identify as immigrants, but people like me have been a part of the United States before this land was even named, and we are here to stay, so it's time for our stories to be told too.

It's also possible, however, that some students felt that they performed emotional labour at a higher level than their classmates.

Guiding questions using safe spaces and brave spaces:

- In considering your curriculum, where do you expect students to encounter dissonance? Where do you expect students to encounter discomfort?
- Working in the open may mean that students make mistakes in the open. How can open educators use the practice of *calling in* to help students correct and be corrected in a constructive way (more on calling in below)?
- Carla observed that when she or her family were reflected in typical academic materials, it was in 'a little side blurb.' She was 'extremely happy' to contribute to an open textbook that would allow future students 'to see themselves represented in their coursework.' How can open educators honour expertise from students like Carla without exploiting these experiences to facilitate the learning of others?

### **Strategies**

Discomfort about working in the open can come from many sources. To offer an incomplete list of possible worries: having novice work held to a higher standard of accountability by a public audience, having to fail where everyone can see you fail, publishing something permanent even though it is not perfect, improperly citing a source and getting in trouble, offending people when talking about race, or trying to solve big -isms. Such concerns are valid. The possibility of student work being shared publicly also raises considerations about future negative repercussions and student privacy that should be balanced against benefits such as a co-author line on a CV or experience handling feedback from experts.

In this section, we will discuss some possible strategies to mitigate the challenges related to putting student work in front of a real-world audience. Working in the open can give rise to uncomfortable emotions that may send a student away from a learning experience that was designed to

bring them into a practitioner community. Open educators need to question whether we are asking more of our students than we think we are; in other words, we all have to be in the brave space together in order to have an airtight answer when students ask us why an assignment is worthwhile. The learning theories on which our group relies suggest that we make a distinction between productive and unproductive discomfort. Digging deeper into open educational practices, we can also sort out discomfort inherent in the learning process from the discomfort that might arise from being a beginner acting in real-world public spaces.

Many of our strategies centre the instructor's agency by suggesting ways to plan a course that minimises unproductive discomfort. Since students may have very different internal reactions, they also need ways to provide input and customise the experience to their needs. Depending on their reaction to discomfort, some students may find that a learning outcome does not justify the emotional toll. This is a valid response, and, just like with research studies, student participants in open pedagogy should be able to opt out of sharing their identity and work right up to the point that they add a Creative Commons license to their contribution. For all of the worthwhile rewards, open practices can carry more risk and require more vulnerability than a typical assignment does. Student commitment and engagement in a course are complex and individual; while this article does not speak to questions of cognition or student motivation, we will offer ideas for prioritising student agency and self-care when working in the open.

### **Co-creating Frameworks that Balance Structure with Flexibility**

The practices in this section balance scaffolding and structured course design with flexibility as a way to provide students with emotional support.<sup>4</sup>

Scaffolding for open educational practices can be approached from two distinct perspectives that are both aligned with open education goals writ large. First, instructors can encourage student agency in developing course structures, including assignments, rubrics, syllabi, course materials, or other components. Second, instructors can exercise their own agency to prioritise flexibility within assessments and the general course structure.

At the same time, educators should offer an out for those students who might find it scary to perform in front of an unknown number of strangers. Open educators can consider what the stakes are for individual students and when it may be necessary to mitigate discomfort by offering an alternative way for the student to demonstrate their learning.

### ***Structure***

Right from the start, students in Liz's open pedagogy course had one overarching course outcome to meet: to contribute to the openly licensed textbook. Within that broad outcome, students wrote individual

learning plans as their first assignment. The plan acknowledges that this course will be a different experience presenting unique challenges and opportunities. Students drafted their plans considering where they were starting from and where they hoped to go. This learning plan is distinct from a course contract as it includes multiple spots to pull over while in progress and to adjust. The full learning plan is included in Appendix A and may be considered an example of heutagogy or self-determined learning (Davis, 2022). Liz, in her role as instructor, made sure that students had multiple paths to demonstrate their learning.

Students in Liz's course reflected on different ways in which they co-created the structure of the course itself. Alexis, a Latino psychology major, was the first student to join the *Contemporary Families* open pedagogy project; because of his early start, he played an important leadership role. He chose to learn about open resources and accessibility. He then created an openly licensed OER and accessibility guide (Castaneda-Perez, 2020), using his knowledge to lead other students. Reflecting on his experience, he said:

Before this project, I had no idea what Creative Commons was, and I didn't really know what copyright and fair use meant. I enjoyed figuring it all out because I feel like it opened up a fountain of resources for all of us to use not only in this project but in other creative endeavours as well. This class also stretched my comfort zone and showed me that my voice does matter.

The individual learning plans that Liz's students wrote provide an example of structured goal-setting for students. Of course, you don't have to write a textbook with your students to create an open pedagogy course component. Open educators can offer multiple ways for students to demonstrate that they have achieved course learning outcomes while engaging with practitioner communities.

Rubrics are a tool that we recommend to ensure that students are meeting learning outcomes even when their contributions are not uniform. DeRosa and Jhangiani (2017) suggests including students in assignment and rubric design. The book *Open Pedagogy Approaches* (Clifton & Davies Hoffman, 2020) has examples of rubrics for assessing open pedagogy assignments; Fraile et al. (2017) includes an example of a co-created rubric in their article's appendix; and Prescott College (n.d.) provides an example of scaffolded student-designed learning goals and evaluation.

### ***Flexibility***

Each student is working in their own ZPD (zone of proximal development, defined above), which itself may shift as students experience emotional responses. Viewing the ZPD as situational is another way to create safe and brave spaces where students are well-supported by the instructor until they're able to close

their own knowledge gaps. Instructor flexibility can anticipate and mitigate the frustration that students may feel if too little or too much is asked of them. Providing multiple paths allows students to manage their own learning.

Students can be given alternate assignments like writing test questions or glossary definitions for the class if the original plan needs adjustment. Cassie was exhilarated about joining the open textbook project because she anticipated being able to make contributions related to her family's experience with incarceration and domestic violence. While she made invaluable additions to the chapter structure, topic choices and research efforts, she found herself stuck when she tried to write. Simultaneously, Liz was looking for a student to convert data into graphs for another chapter. Cassie eagerly volunteered and created multiple professional visuals for the text. Although she still expresses disappointment in herself, she also recognises the value that she added to the work.

While open pedagogy is intended to be inclusive, it invariably still leaves some students out. Liz found that students who have been successful in highly structured courses may find the open nature of this kind of project more challenging; she supported these students with consistent communication and feedback. Returning to the metaphor of the liminal space as a voyage across an open sea, instructors can steer students into protected bays where they can safely rest and recover during their journeys. Amy Huskey (student), for example, talked about needing to take breaks from the project in order to pace herself. She added:

Since this class was so fluid in nature, it could be challenging to identify the work expectations. I think flexibility was critical, with the understanding that everyone has various talents, interests and time that they could put into the project. Having this flexibility helped me feel like whatever contributions I could make would be valued, and this alleviated the stress that could have been experienced given the unknown path of the class. I also felt that I could honestly communicate with Liz if I was struggling at any point in the class and truly feel that together we could find some sort of joint resolution.

### ***Faculty Considerations***

As a final recommendation in this section on balance, instructors can also think about how new and existing teaching strategies will affect their workload. Liz found that her group of 13 students was optimal in many ways, but also that it was too large for her to attentively and fully honour each one of them and their work (to put this in perspective, it was like teaching 13 students in an independent study, using the equivalent of 7% of a full-time faculty workload). This issue could have been mitigated by limiting the number of students in the group and/or by Liz asking for additional release time for her work.

Course redesign itself can be incremental or scaffolded. Open education doesn't require enormous change all at once; course redesign should not lead to unsustainable labour practices for faculty. For example, for faculty who would like to dip a toe into the open pedagogy water, a very structured approach would be to start with a Wikipedia project because Wiki Education (<https://wikiedu.org>) provides curriculum and support as a starting point. The Open Pedagogy Project Roadmap (Riechman-Murphy & McGeary, 2021) is another resource that can systematically help faculty plan, scope and support an open pedagogy project.

### **Cultivating a Practice of Self-Awareness and -Care**

The second category of strategies that our team identified prioritises self-awareness and -care (for yourself and others) to mitigate potential student discomfort in open education settings. Practising compassionate and critical self-reflection can deepen learning and decrease anxiety. We discussed strategies that can be used either inside or outside of the classroom. We also considered whether some approaches could be modified in order to recognise the varying degrees of privilege or minoritisation that students bring to the course.

### ***Cultural Humility***

Lori and her colleagues' work on cultural humility in libraries structured our thinking in this area. Humility has a specific meaning in this context: 'Two essential features of humility can be summarised as accuracy, rather than modesty or devaluing, and becoming unselfed in an appreciative and self-reflective way' (Hurley et al., 2019, p. 11). Extending from this definition:

Cultural humility involves the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the other person, the ability to recognise the context in which interactions occur, and a commitment to redress power imbalances and other structural issues to benefit all parties. (Hurley et al., 2019, p. 12)

The ongoing practice of cultural humility may help instructors using open educational practices to acknowledge and encourage the development of student expertise while managing the faculty-student power dynamic. At the same time, accurate self-perception grounds the instructor in the expertise that they bring. Cultural humility takes positionality into consideration in order not to be reductive about power dynamics.

Likewise, cultural humility can inform how instructors respond to students' feelings of doubt, uncertainty, or inadequacy, helping them more accurately assess and own their expertise and the value of

their contribution as a voice currently missing from the discourse. For example, Wesley was one of the students in the *Contemporary Families* project who worried about whether their writing would be good enough for the textbook, saying:

This project challenged my view of my writing quite a bit, in some good ways but also in some ways that are hard to fully grasp in myself. When I first started working on the project, I had it set in my mind that I could write a bunch on my topic, do a bit of editing, and it'd be totally fine. I think this is still true in what my goal should have been, but, as I wrote, I felt a strong push back from myself and my need to over-edit myself to make myself sound smart and prove to myself I deserved to be in this project.

As the project wrapped up, Wesley and other students with similar worries reflected that discussions on readings about differing viewpoints on academic writing helped to relieve anxiety and made a significant impact on their ability to overcome self-censure (Liz assigned *Should Writers Use Their Own English?* by Vershawn Ashanti Young [2010] and *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* by Gloria Anzaldúa [1987]).

Students were observed practising cultural humility, increasing both their connection with others and their knowledge base (although the concept of cultural humility was not introduced in the course). For example, Julia described her experience in the seminar this way:

One thing I have been practising this term that I learned last term was simply the idea of being a better listener. I may have something to say or contribute, but I wanted to practice listening and allow others to speak instead; this way, you can learn more about other perspectives and points of view. We had such a diverse group in this class, and I honestly enjoyed working with everyone and hearing all their unique inputs so much. Overall, I am comparable to a sponge at this point in my life, and I constantly feel the need to know more, do more, help more, listen more, read more and so on. This is a great thing for my growth and desire to challenge myself.

Extending the interpersonal aspect of cultural humility, academics can rely on a similar skill set when participating in scholarship as a conversation. Scaffolding open educational practices can include preparing students to anticipate responses to work that they share publicly. For example, is your vocabulary going to hold up over time? Students may signal respectful intentions by using *Latinx* in a post, only to be publicly corrected to use *Latine* instead. It's an ongoing practice for any writer to react with curiosity rather than defensiveness while maintaining an accurate assessment of the self (in other words, not deciding that you are the worst, but not putting yourself on a pedestal either).

### ***Metacognitive Tools***

Open pedagogy posits that students should not only participate actively in learning, but also develop metacognitive critical thinking skills about the process of learning and teaching. Metacognition, or the awareness and control of one's own cognitive processes, was pioneered by John Flavell (1979).

Metacognitive experiences have both an affective and a cognitive component. Under Efklides's model (2006), a student author may experience negative emotions because they are not fluent in a task, which makes them perceive it (not necessarily accurately) as difficult. As noted throughout this paper, open pedagogy is a novel experience for most students, and they are asked to draw on skills in which they are not yet fluent. In particular, students come away with a greater understanding of both teaching *and* learning, and perhaps think both like a teacher and like a learner.

Helen, an enthusiastic student who is raising two teenagers, already had a career in the field of corrections. Passionate about social justice, Helen dove into reading and researching housing practices that have resulted in increasing numbers of families in the US being housing insecure or homeless. Helen described her experience this way:

The other concerning thing about having sole responsibility for a subject in a chapter was that my peers and future students would see and judge my writing.... I tried to say what was meaningful to the issue. There are many opposing viewpoints (etic and emic) on most issues. I tried to keep my opinions out and the facts in; to think deeply and critically on why and how things are, to articulate without overwriting. I am proud of what I have contributed.

In other words, students can make better choices when they understand what 'feelings, judgements, or estimates, and online task-specific knowledge' (Efklides, 2006, p. 3) they bring with them: they can shift between the roles of a teacher and a learner. When students are taught to be more aware of their cognition, they can be taught metacognitive strategies to self-regulate and observe their affect and cognition through strategies like journaling and exit tickets (Owen & Vista, 2017). In Liz's lesson plan for the course where students would create the book (Appendix A), she asks students metacognitive questions to encourage engagement, growth mindset and reflection on potential support options (e.g., Why are they doing this? What strengths, weaknesses and skills do they bring? What are they afraid of and worried about?).

### *Care in the Classroom Community*

Many educators posit that emotions may be an essential part of learning, if they do not cross the line from uncomfortable to unsafe. Since this line may be different for different students, as seen in the safe space/brave space debate, an instructor can always take the important step of connecting students with campus mental health resources and both discussing and modelling self-care.

Beyond simply listing this information in the syllabus, instructors and peers in a small learning group like the one that created *Contemporary Families* can also support one another. For example, after discovering that the discrimination she faced was systemic, rather than personal, Helen felt defeated. She said:

There was a week where I was overwhelmed with the information I was discovering and the inequality that was uncovered. I had a dozen tabs open on my computer that all revealed stories and statistics that were depressing.... I thought the discrimination against me was individual. Now I know that discrimination is built into the system.

This kind of deep comprehension can be devastating if faced alone. Helen shared her response with her peers. This normalised the emotional response and enabled students to support one another. With the support of her learning community, she writes that she ‘took a week off of writing anything and was able to move on after.’ This example shows a learning community that is as supportive of emotional health as new knowledge.

It’s important for students to know that discomfort itself is not a goal of learning, nor is it always a signal of productive learning. Sometimes discomfort is the result of revisiting trauma or the experience of managing ongoing external threats. For discomfort to be productive, Taylor and Baker (2019) suggest that students can be made aware of the role discomfort often plays in learning, as well as the differences between productive and unproductive discomfort. Instructors should provide adequate support through developing students’ ability to critically self-reflect, encouraging student agency, conducting effective dialogue, and considering student and instructor positionalities throughout the learning process. The likelihood of student discomfort in the learning process also suggests that instructors should carefully consider what learning outcomes will justify that discomfort and whether that experience will be disproportionately distributed across students of varying backgrounds (Taylor & Baker, 2019).

Verduzco-Baker (2018) makes three further recommendations that facilitate brave spaces work in conventional classes:

1. Assign students readings of primary sources that relate the experiences of marginalised or oppressed groups can promote understanding and learning while preserving the dignity of students who may be members of those groups. This allows students from more privileged groups to learn without burdening students from more marginalised groups with the task of teaching topics that might be emotionally fraught or traumatising to them.
2. Practice *calling in* as opposed to *calling out* in order to manage ignorant or hurtful statements and misunderstandings. Calling in consists of repeating the misstatement in a more respectful way, reiterating an assumption of good intent, and then explaining why the misstatement is harmful. Calling in brings the student back into the community and encourages continued engagement, even when they have expressed hurtful or inaccurate beliefs.
3. As a brave instructor, model an appropriate response to being called in, which involves treating the correction as a learning opportunity, responding in a non-defensive manner, and emphasising your intent to learn more about the topic independently (Verduzo-Baker, 2018).

From the beginning of her project, Liz showed that she cared about her students and was interested in their feelings and well-being when she asked what they were afraid and worried about in her individualised learning plan. She also asked them to reflect on their skills and strengths, since historically marginalised groups like women and people of colour may be more likely to have their abilities discounted by others and therefore feel less certain in their abilities. Throughout the course, Liz made time to pause and check in with the individuals and the group to normalise and address feelings and challenges.

An environment that emphasises care can foster peer support, self-awareness and authentic dialogue. Care for self and care for others balances critical self-reflection for students and for faculty who are engaged in open pedagogy and transformative learning. Since open pedagogy can present a disorienting challenge for both students and instructors, instructors must be prepared to support students with the emotions that will inevitably arise.

### **Crowdsourcing Solutions from OER Communities**

Use your campus resources and open education communities! While it may seem that Liz had all of the answers to the struggles that she observed in her students, it was by reaching out to others that many of those answers emerged. Liz worked closely with Michaela (the OER librarian at her institution) and the college's counselling department. Michaela also reached out to Amy and asked her to send an email to several OER communities (the Open Education Network, the Community College Consortium for OER [CCOER] and the SPARC Libraries and OER forum [LibOER]) to find out if other open pedagogy

practitioners had experienced similar challenges. The email elicited four thoughtful and empathetic responses (Appendix B). We also shared our initial thoughts about this topic at the OEN Summer Summit (Hofer, Lin Hanick, Pearce, Townsend, & Willi Hooper, 2021), resulting in helpful feedback from others interested in open pedagogy. The beauty of open education is that open educators are predisposed to work collaboratively, transparently and cross-institutionally.

### **Visual Model**

Our group developed a visual model, designed by Silvia, in order to explore our ideas about how open educators can raise or lower the stakes of an open pedagogy assignment. We suggest thinking about the model as a tool for scaffolding assignments – for example, you might not assign work with the highest challenge level for the most public audience (upper right corner of the model) if your students aren't prepared by first testing the waters with lower-stakes work. The model may suggest flexible approaches that allow students to opt out of components of the assignment that are causing unproductive discomfort, such as content areas, privacy settings, letter grades, emotional work, public sharing, or open licenses. Where instructors observe students getting stuck in a liminal space, the model may suggest a shift to something different that's within the zone of proximal development but not triggering.

Here's our caveat: 'All models are wrong, but some are useful' (Box, 1979). Even though we're presenting a visual model that is shaped like a grid and borrows x and y axes from math, our intention is not to imply precision. We hope that readers will understand the model as a gradient – not a chart – that explores relationships. We can suggest, in general, that assessments requiring high support for students will present a high challenge level for the instructor; the more open things get, the higher the challenge level because the instructor needs to provide more support.<sup>5</sup>

We've populated the visual model with an example of an assignment representing the challenge level and audience type that corresponds to each cell of the gradient, but we expect that our model will need to be edited or even redrawn depending on your situation, so we're including a blank version with a word bank in Appendix C. We acknowledge, for example, that your students may see technology as less of a challenge than this group of co-authors expected. Or, your discipline may work with materials, like proprietary datasets, with more complex copyright considerations than our model can address. Challenge level can represent the time you have to prepare for a new assignment, the emotional labour required to responsibly support student work in the open, accessibility concerns, or familiarity with a new platform. Our hope is that this model will provide you with a starting point for scaffolding the affective dimensions of your open educational practices.

Figure 1

## Visual Model for Open Pedagogy and Student Discomfort



## Conclusion

You might be thinking at this point that Liz's open pedagogy course was amazing because she is such a wonderful teacher, and she is, in fact, an award-winning faculty member at Linn-Benton Community College. Because Liz is very good at what she does, her students did not feel like Silvia's mom in Chipotle (much). Yet, Liz's students faced challenges that Liz now better understands and would prepare to support differently in the future. In this conclusion, we want to normalise the difficulties of open pedagogy; there will inevitably be ambiguity and challenge.

Liz discovered that working in a real-world context means providing real-world support as well. Her students were contributing to a textbook that had real-life stakes, and therefore needed real-life solutions in order to move forward when they got stuck. Yet even though many students experienced discomfort and even distress in the process, they were still able to reflect positively on the learning experience. Liz writes:

I am someone who is very comfortable with the liminal space. I actually did not know this term until starting to work with my co-authors here, but as soon as I heard the definition, I said, ‘That’s me! That’s where I live.’ Developing a greater understanding of this concept helped me to understand how and why students felt uncomfortable at times during the project. While they had the benefit of previously being led through at least one term of learning in which I explicitly stated the value of being in their ‘stretch zones’ (rather than a safety zone or a panic zone), it was an additional leap to be expected to be in that zone while I myself was also in that zone. Like riding a roller coaster, the experience can be at times exhilarating, and at times panic zone-inducing.

When building a roller coaster, you want to build a safe one. You don’t want a malfunctioning lap bar. You don’t want a roller coaster with a harmful narrative, like Disneyland’s Splash Mountain. You build a good roller coaster, but you can’t make everyone have fun. But! You build a good roller coaster that is just as likely to be safe as it is to be fun, and you share as you can.

The theories and strategies explored in this article highlight the ways that faculty can more effectively design open pedagogy projects that pay attention to students’ emotional responses and avoid that panic zone. Emotions and cognition are intertwined. Conceptual understanding of the theories outlined here will support faculty in practising open pedagogy, keeping students in the stretch zone, and guiding them in transformative experiences.



Lori Townsend, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1627-0449>

Michaela Willi Hooper, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6870-902X>

## REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). How to tame a wild tongue. In *Borderlands la frontera: The new mestiza* (pp. 53–64). Aunt Lute.
- Arao, B., & Clements, K. (2018). From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice in the art of effective facilitation. In L. Landreman (Ed.), *The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators* (pp. 135–150). Stylus Publishing.
- Box, G. E. P. (1979). Robustness in the strategy of scientific model building. In R. L. Launer & G. N. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Robustness in statistics* (pp. 201–236). Academic Press.
- Castaneda-Perez, A. (2020). *Understanding open educational resources and accessibility*.  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Eq2SZu0vylbkcGkC4\\_18AutzupgcNfpNSMgLQ7Qlh34/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Eq2SZu0vylbkcGkC4_18AutzupgcNfpNSMgLQ7Qlh34/edit#)

- Davis, L. (2022, April 21). Heutagogy explained: Self-determined learning in education. *PowerSchool*.  
<https://www.powerschool.com/blog/heutagogy-explained-self-determined-learning-in-education/>
- DeRosa, R. (2020). Foreword by Robin DeRosa. In A. Clifton & K. D. Hoffman (Eds.), *Open pedagogy approaches: Faculty, library and student collaborations*.  
<https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/openpedagogyapproaches/>
- DeRosa, R., & Jhangiani, R. (2017). Open pedagogy. In E. Mays (Ed.), *A guide to making open textbooks with students*. The Rebus Community for Open Textbook Creation.  
<https://press.rebus.community/makingopentextbookswithstudents/>
- Dirkx, J. M., Mezirow, J., & Cranton, P. (2006). Musings and reflections on the meaning, context and process of transformative learning: A dialogue between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 4(2), 123–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1541344606287503>
- Efklides, A. (2006). Metacognition and affect: What can metacognitive experiences tell us about the learning process? *Educational Research Review*, 1, 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2005.11.001>
- Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental inquiry. *American Psychologist*, 34(10), 906–911. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.34.10.906>
- Fraille, J., Panadero, E., & Pardo, R. (2017). Co-creating rubrics: The effects on self-regulated learning, self-efficacy and performance of establishing assessment criteria with students. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 53, 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2017.03.003>
- Hofer, A., Lin Hanick, S., & Townsend, L. (2019). *Transforming information literacy instruction: Threshold concepts in theory and practice*. Libraries Unlimited.
- Hofer, A., Lin Hanick, S., Pearce, L., Townsend, L., & Willi Hooper, M. D. (2021, June 14). *Your discomfort is valid: Supporting big feelings in open pedagogy*. OEN Summer Summit. <https://youtu.be/YN5vFPXaVVU>
- Hurley, D. A., Kostelecky, S., & Townsend, L. (2019). Cultural humility in libraries. *Reference Services Review*, 47(4), 544–555. [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1135&context=ulls\\_fsp](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1135&context=ulls_fsp)
- Katz, S. (2019). Applying transformative learning theory to open education. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 6(2). <https://jotl.uco.edu/index.php/jotl/article/view/261>
- Krathwohl, D. R., Bloom, B. S., & Masia, B. B. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook II: Affective domain*. David McKay.
- Mariani, L. (1997). Teacher support and teacher challenge in promoting learner autonomy. *Perspectives*, 23(2).  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263860135\\_Teacher\\_Support\\_and\\_Teacher\\_Challenge\\_in\\_Promoting\\_Learner\\_Autonomy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263860135_Teacher_Support_and_Teacher_Challenge_in_Promoting_Learner_Autonomy)
- Meyer, J., Land, R., & Baillie, C. (2010). *Threshold concepts and transformational learning*. Brill.
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education*, 28(2), 100–110.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367802800202>
- Owen, D., & Vista, A. (2017). *Strategies for teaching metacognition in classrooms* [Blog]. Brookings Institute.  
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2017/11/15/strategies-for-teaching-metacognition-in-classrooms/>

- Pearce, E. B. (2020). *Contemporary families: An equity lens*. <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/families/>
- Powell, K. C., & Kalina, C. J. (2009). Cognitive and social constructivism: Developing tools for an effective classroom. *Education, 130*(2), 241–250.
- Prescott College. (n.d.). *Learning contract form*. <https://library.prescott.edu/my/resident-undergraduate-resources/assets/course-contracts/resident-undergraduate-learning-contract-a.pdf>
- Riehman-Murphy, C., & McGeary, B. (2021). *Open pedagogy project roadmap*. <https://oepr roadmap.psu.edu/>
- Robertson, J. (2010). *Threshold concepts and open educational resources*. <http://blogs.cetis.org.uk/johnr/2010/09/10/thresholdconceptsoers/>
- Sadler, K. (2020, March 2). The COVID-19 outbreak highlights the potential of preprints. *Times Higher Education*. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/covid-19-outbreak-highlights-potential-preprints>
- Taylor, E. W. (2008). Transformative learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2008*(119), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.301>
- Taylor, K. B., & Baker, A. R. (2019). Examining the role of discomfort in collegiate learning and development. *Journal of College Student Development, 60*(2), 173–188. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0017>
- Thiede, M. (2019, October 30). *Who writes traditional textbooks? Who writes OERs? A preliminary analysis* [Poster]. The 16th Annual Open Education Conference, Glendale, AZ. <https://opened19.exordo.com/programme/presentation/179>
- Tur, G., Havemann, L., Marsh, D., Keefer, J. M., & Nascimbeni, F. (2020). Becoming an open educator: Towards an open threshold framework. *Research in Learning Technology, 28*. <https://doi.org/10.25304/rlt.v28.2338>
- Verduzco-Baker, L. (2018). Modified brave spaces: Calling in brave instructors. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 4*(4), 585–592. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218763696>
- Wiley, D. (2013, October 21). *What is open pedagogy? Iterating toward openness*. <https://opencontent.org/blog/archives/2975>
- Willi Hooper, M. D., & Scharf, E. (2016). Connecting and reflecting: Transformative learning in academic libraries. *Journal of Transformative Education, 15*(1), 79–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344616670033>
- Young, V. A. (2010). Should writers use they own English? *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies, 12*, 110–117. <https://doi.org/10.17077/2168-569X.1095>
- Zheng, L. (2016, May 15). Why your brave space sucks. *Stanford Daily*. <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2016/05/15/why-your-brave-space-sucks/>

## APPENDIX A

### ***Individual HDFS 298 Learning Plan***

Name:

Term:

Number of Credits:

1. The strengths I bring to this project include:  
*(consider your dispositions and internal characteristics)*
  
2. The knowledge I bring to this project includes:  
*(consider your prior experience, learning and knowledge)*
  
3. The skills I bring to this project include:  
*(consider your concrete skills and abilities)*
  
4. The worries or questions I have about this project are:
  
5. The reason I am here is:
  
6. I will deeply engage in growth related to privilege, power and oppression. The reading, viewing and/or listening that I plan to do includes the following:  
*(include your chosen text and any podcasts, videos, or resources you want to examine)*
  
7. The topic area(s) I plan to work on is/are:  
*(which chapters do you plan to work on; include what kind of work you plan to do)*
  
8. The threshold concept(s) I plan to examine is/are:  
*(concepts in the introductory chapters do you want to understand better and/or will you work on [2 credit students only])*
  
9. By the end of the term, I plan to have a greater understanding of:  
*(be as specific and comprehensive as possible; aim high!)*
  
10. By the end of the term, I plan to produce:

*(be as specific and comprehensive as possible; aim high!)*

On Google Drive, make a copy (File → Make a copy) of this document and then edit it. Share it back to Liz as a document (not a .pdf). Turn it in by Friday of Week Two (earlier if you are ready).

**Remember: your plan may change as you encounter challenges, learn and I guide your work.**

## APPENDIX B

### *Emotional distress & Open ped Listserv Responses*

#### **Amy's message**

A group of students working on an open pedagogy project for human services are experiencing some emotional distress brought up by the project – a combination of imposter syndrome and distress over the content they're exploring. We've reached out to our counselling professionals, but I wondered if anyone had experience or suggestions specific to open pedagogy. The instructor has reminded students they've all exceeded expectations and plans to make the course pass/no-pass next time.

#### **Response 1**

When I taught Critical Thinking, we would discuss ALL the 'triggering' topics – guns, abortion, capital punishment, racism, etc. I used the Journal tool in Blackboard to give students a safe space to vent if needed. We also have a licensed psychologist on campus, as well as pointers to a host of community mental health services.

#### **Response 2**

In my experience with open pedagogy projects, all of my students have experienced this. Our students' learning history doesn't prepare them well for participating in projects where there's no clear 'right' answer, and it manifests in the types of symptoms you're describing.

I think the instructor did an excellent job. The only other thing I've added is providing strong models (though this tends to decrease creativity), making each stage prior to the final a 'completion' grade, and emphasising revise and resubmit as part of the projects.

#### **Response 3**

I don't know that it is necessary to make the course pass/fail. But I would recommend changing what is graded. When I do team open pedagogy projects, I grade the teamwork, not the product. Good teamwork produces good content, and poor teamwork produces poor content, so it isn't necessary to grade what is produced. Just encourage them to work well together and reward those who do.

There's a sample rubric posted at [https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Collaborative\\_Learning/Rubrics](https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Collaborative_Learning/Rubrics). This rubric fully encourages collaboration. Students who over-dominate lose points, just as students who don't participate lose points. The rubric is completed by students individually each week, evaluating all team members and reviewed by me with individual feedback and recommendations for the coming week.

I've used this for a fairly wide variety of courses over more than a decade, and it has worked very well.

#### **Response 4**

For open pedagogy/OER creation: a recently retired OER author at our university advocated an approach to OER creation that rested on the nature of Open information to lower the stakes for the creator: create something, share it, get feedback, let others help improve it. The idea was that an OER doesn't have to be perfect, and, in some ways, you're missing the point of OER if you worry too much about having it be perfect. This is how I would approach students with impostor syndrome, I think – to measure 'good enough' for this project relative to themselves; to create and share with good intentions but also with the knowledge that the project will be imperfect. I can even see that as a possible feature, not a bug, of OER: we share early and often instead of filtering through content editors or other traditional gatekeepers, so more people with much more diverse perspectives can find the OER, suggest improvements, point out blind spots or errors.

Another idea, given the focus of this project, could be looking at peoples' experiences with open science around COVID-19. Researchers are sharing preprints and datasets with incredible speed; that openness has meant that some of the research shared included errors, yes, but 'mistakes were picked up within hours,' as the subheading of one *Times Higher Education* piece (Sadler, 2020) notes. Openness is working as intended – getting information out there faster, so the good information can have a quicker impact, and so errors can be flagged and fixed. Depending on the particular open pedagogy project, there may be a lot of parallels with COVID-19 preprints: information on human services will matter to a lot of people. Maybe there's even a way for these students to share their work at an early stage, and dedicate part of the end of the course to improving it once it's shared?

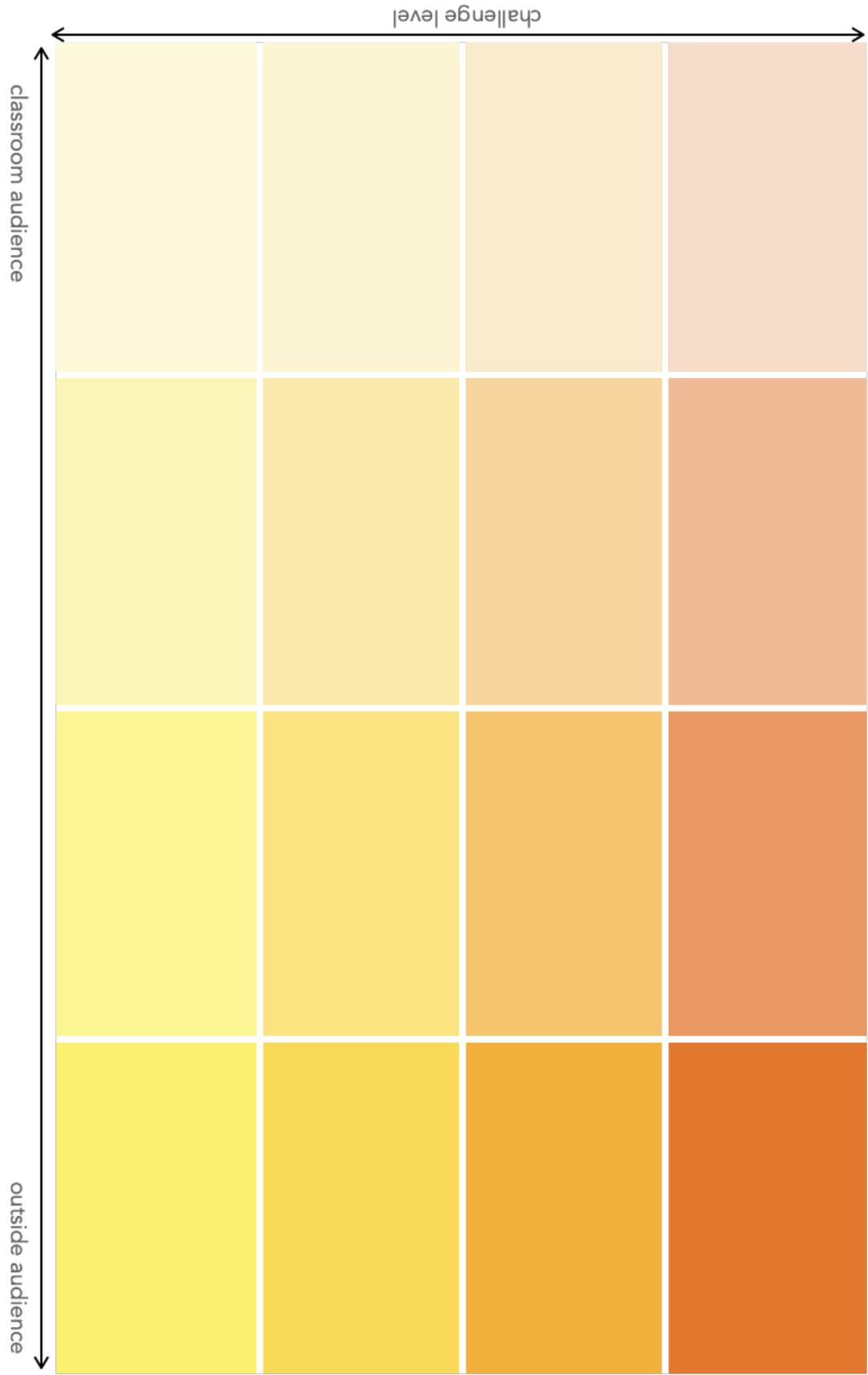
## APPENDIX C

### ***Blank Visual Model Template and Word Bank***

Use the word bank (or other open practices of your choosing) to fill out the blank visual model template on the next page based on your personal or institutional challenges. Challenge Level may be determined by prep time, risk, emotional cost/labour/investment, copyright knowledge, accessibility, platform, or technology. This template can also be downloaded and edited as Google Slides ([shorturl.at/hipqv](http://shorturl.at/hipqv)) or Google Drawing ([shorturl.at/GU689](http://shorturl.at/GU689))

#### Word Bank for Blank Visual Model Template

- Students write their own assignment prompt and grading rubric
- Students identify a learning gap and work with the instructor to create a tool to help them fill those gaps
- Students pick the format or genre of their project (infographic, standup routine, vlog, etc.)
- Students choose the appropriate CC license for their work
- Students submit all assignments to class blog or ePortfolio and provide classmates with regular feedback
- Students customise an open textbook for local context by adding relevant images and examples
- Students use census data to do market research
- Students create definitions for a class glossary by identifying terms that come up in lectures and discussions
- Students create or update a course reader for future students
- After finishing a unit of study, students create video introductions to the material for future students
- Students create lecture slides for future terms
- Students contribute a data point to an open-access spreadsheet
- Students create open designs for 3d printing of useful objects
- Students write and submit a letter to an editor
- Students write and distribute an open zine



---

<sup>1</sup> An insightful essay by Stacy Katz (2019) applies Mezirow's stages of transformative learning to the process by which faculty discover and adopt OER for their courses.

<sup>2</sup> 'Difference, Power and Discrimination' courses are designed to introduce students to the concepts of structural discrimination at LBCC and OSU (<https://dpd.oregonstate.edu/dpd-courses>).

<sup>3</sup> Similar to Katz's application of Mezirow's transformative learning theory to faculty OER adoption (2019), in a blog post John Robertson theorizes several transformative concepts that faculty must grasp in order to effectively become OER practitioners, which he argues may fit Meyer and Land's criteria for threshold concepts (2010). Tur et al (2020) continue this line of thinking in an article exploring three of the threshold concept criteria relating to open educators in greater depth: transformative, troublesome and liminal.

<sup>4</sup> We were surprised to learn from our colleague, Bob Schroeder, that Bloom developed an affective taxonomy alongside his better-known taxonomy for the cognitive domain (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1956). While Bloom's taxonomies have been rightly critiqued for being too rigid, linear, hierarchical, etc., it was still helpful to be able to situate our work within the ongoing conversation about affect and learning.

<sup>5</sup> After working on our visual model, we found a relevant antecedent that should be acknowledged, though it did not inform our design. Luciano Mariani (1997) created a figure where the x axis represents a scale from high support to low support, and the y axis represents a scale from high challenge to low challenge. Mariani writes: 'It is interesting to use this framework to discuss what each of the four patterns involves in terms of teacher's behaviour and students' reactions' (p. 6).