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Adapting for Anti-Racism: Collaboratively diversifying faculty open professional development

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Introduction

Academic libraries in the United States have spearheaded Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives to address and lessen the high cost of textbooks that students face (Katz, 2019). Through these efforts, libraries provide training and incentives to help faculty replace their commercial textbooks with OER, which are resources either with a Creative Commons license or in the public domain. Librarians are particularly well-suited to leading and assisting in OER initiatives and are positioned to support faculty in effectively finding and evaluating OER given their expertise and research skills.

At Lehman College, the original goal of the OER initiative aligned with the focus on lowering textbook costs and, thus, centered around the idea of providing students access to their required course materials. Given that over forty percent of matriculated students come from households earning less than \$20,000 per year, this initiative had a real ability to help students access course materials (Chellman & Truelsch, 2017). To support faculty, the College library developed a variety of professional development opportunities for faculty to learn about OER. These included workshops to learn more about OER and Creative Commons licenses as well as individual sessions with faculty to identify OER that met their learning outcomes. Again, the focus of these opportunities were mainly on how to find and evaluate OER that met the course learning outcomes, understanding Creative Commons licenses, and how to deposit items in the institutional repository. These efforts strongly aligned with institutional goals to increase educational access and attainment for students (Katz, 2019).

The focus of Lehman College's OER efforts began to shift following the summer of 2020, when many educators paused to consider how to address racial injustices after the murders of black men and women, such as Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. The

Library as well as individual departments issued statements condemning these racist actions. The Library statement expressed that Library faculty:

pledge to redouble our efforts to offer programs that address and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion; will continue to support Lehman College's social justice mission - and remain committed to representing diversity and inclusion in instruction, public services, and scholarship; will continue to educate ourselves around issues of race, power, and privilege as we support our community. (2020)

This Statement of Solidarity and Support indicated how the Library aligned with the College's efforts and also would endeavor to educate ourselves on racial injustice to support the community.

In open education, the desire to address social justice issues beyond cost was already present. However, these related events catalyzed the recognition of the problem into action. One response to the issues of racial injustice was developed by the Community College Consortium for OER (CCCOER) and College of the Canyons. These institutions received funding from the Hewlett Foundation and developed an openly licensed professional development workshop entitled "Open For Anti-Racism" (OFAR). Stacy attended the 2021 Open Education Conference presentation on the OFAR workshop. This professional development seemed like it met a gap in the open education and anti-racist pedagogy offerings at the College. After seeking approval from the Chief Librarian, Stacy included adapting the OFAR workshop as a pilot in the Lehman College proposal for funding. The proposal was enthusiastically received and supported.

With funding from New York State, Stacy and Sherry adapted and piloted a version of the OFAR workshop in spring 2022. The participants ranged in terms of their rank, discipline, part- or full-time status, as well as their demographics and life experiences. Through the OFAR

workshop, faculty learned about anti-racism, OER, open pedagogy, and how to leverage open for anti-racist teaching.

Given the newness of focusing on anti-racism in OER, Stacy and Sherry sought to understand the impact of the workshop, with the hope that it extends beyond the participants to the students in their classrooms and, ultimately, to the culture of the college at large. In this paper, we share findings and insights from the pilot year of the OFAR workshop at Lehman College. We focus both on the process of adapting the workshop for our local context and takeaways from faculty participants.

Literature Review

We frame this paper and the OFAR work in three bodies of literature. First, we consider the existing, though nascent, research on open education and social justice, which provides an overarching framework for OFAR. Next, we turn our attention to textbooks and traditional curricular materials and research that compares those with OER in terms of cognitive and representational justice as an impetus for the OFAR workshop. Finally, we conclude the literature review by considering the role of college and university libraries in OER work.

Open Education Social Justice Framework

While open education initiatives often stem from a desire to increase access and equity (Katz, 2019), open education is not inherently a social justice endeavor. Lambert (2018) evaluated open education literature according to three social justice principles, namely *redistributive justice*, which relates to the (re)allocation of human and material resources; *recognitive justice*, which involves recognizing and respecting difference, oftentimes through the basic inclusion of diversity in curricular materials; and *representational justice*, which is similar

to recognitive justice in a focus on representation and inclusion, but goes deeper and includes focuses on equity and political voice. Redistributive justice is most often fulfilled within an open education initiative as it refers to an allocation of resources to those who have less. By using free and open resources, these initiatives enact redistributive justice. Recognitive justice, with its focus on respect for a variety of identities of diverse communities might be demonstrated through the inclusion of images and names from varied cultures, is less often a guaranteed outcome of a faculty member switching to OER resources. Similarly, the focus of representational justice on the ability of varied communities to create and speak for themselves in the materials, rather than have their stories determined by the dominant majority, is even less often realized via OER materials.

Given the shortcomings of traditional OER to encapsulate all three aspects of social justice, Lambert developed a new definition of open education *predicated on* social justice. In her conception, “Open Education is the development of free digitally enabled learning materials and experiences primarily by and for the benefit and empowerment of non-privileged learners who may be under-represented in education systems or marginalised in their global context” (p. 239). This lens provides a view of open education as necessarily imbricated with social justice principles.

Social Justice in Commercial Textbooks versus OER

Research has shown that OER are not necessarily better than commercial textbooks in terms of representational or recognitive social justice. Brandle (2019) examined history textbooks for coverage of historically marginalized populations. She found that openly licensed textbooks fared no better or worse than their commercially published textbooks. While the open textbooks are free and therefore meet the redistributive justice benchmark, they lack recognitive

and representational justice. However, the open license allows for the potential for these forms of social justice because they can be edited to recognize historically marginalized populations, or allow for representational justice where groups create and openly license materials to represent themselves.

Exploring how OER can allow for the incorporation of cognitive and representational justice and agency among historically marginalized groups is still at a nascent stage.

Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter (2018) argued that the open education movement needs to address the political, cultural, and social aspects of social justice in order to fulfill the value that it purports, particularly in the Global South. Adam et al. (2019) discussed the importance of decolonizing open to not reproduce existing inequities in education.

The Library's Role in Open Education

Libraries have led and contributed to OER initiatives across the United States (Goodsett, Loomis, & Miles, 2016; Katz, 2019; Essmiller, Thompson, & Alvarado-Albertorio, 2020). The contributions of librarians and desire for library leadership in open education is evident based on the professional development programs developed by Creative Commons, the Open Textbook Network, and SPARC to involve librarians in leading OER programs (Creative Commons, 2020; Open Textbook Network, n.d.; SPARC, n.d.). These professional development opportunities for librarians have not necessarily had an explicit focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). However, there is a growing awareness within libraries of DEI issues and desire to address these inequities.

Seiferle-Valencia (2020) explicitly discussed how academic libraries are positioned to engage faculty in social justice aligned open education. They contend that this practice responds to the American Library Association and Association for College and Research Libraries' calls

to support diverse content and address historical and racial inequities (American Library Association, n.d.; Association of College and Research Libraries, 2019). Librarians are critical in advancing the notion of intentionally engaged OER by “selecting inclusive and representative OER, exploring OERventions for those people missing from dominant-narrative-aligned resources, and insisting that intentional and specific social justice work is an essential part of open praxis” (Seiferle-Valencia, 2020, p. 483). This resonates as a rationale for specific anti-racist social justice open education professional development.

Background and Context

Lehman College is a four-year, senior college in Bronx, New York and part of the larger City University of New York. It is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and demographically diverse, as 136 cultures are represented on campus, with 33% of students born outside the United States (Lehman College, 2023). The Library supports campus diversity initiatives and also holds internal programs, such as a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group. The Open for Anti-Racism Workshop expands on the Library’s anti-racism efforts. It provides a way for the Library to facilitate an experience where faculty can explore how OER and open pedagogy can support anti-racism. The Open Resources Librarian partnered with an Education faculty member, Sherry, to adapt and co-facilitate the workshop. Stacy is a white woman in a white, female dominated profession, while Sherry identifies as a Black-biracial woman, also in a white-dominated profession (Sleeter, 2001; Hathcock, 2015).

Open For Anti-Racism Workshop Structure

The OFAR workshop at Lehman College consisted of 4 modules: 1. What is anti-racism? 2. What are OER and how can they support anti-racism? 3. What is open pedagogy and how can

it support anti-racism? 4. Creating Your Anti-Racism Action Plan (Daly et. al, 2022). These modules were adapted from the [California Community Colleges' OFAR Workshop](#) that was published in Canvas Commons. An introduction module to the course sets out agreements for a positive learning environment and for how faculty will engage with the material and each other.

In terms of the substantive modules, the first included a definition of anti-racism and other key terms. It discussed anti-racist and culturally relevant pedagogy and asked faculty to reflect on the materials they assign in their courses. OER is defined in the second module. That module also described where to find OER and a review of efficacy studies. Importantly, this section was critical of OER by discussing how OER have been largely written by white faculty. It further discussed how OER does not fare better than commercially published textbooks on coverage of historically marginalized populations. The third module shifted to a discussion of open pedagogy and moving to assignments where students create and openly license their assignments and are centered as creators. This module prepared faculty for the final module in which they design an action plan for how they will integrate OER and open pedagogy to create an anti-racist curriculum. The action plan provided a callback to the first module, which provides a definition of anti-racism in contrast to non-racist in that it requires action (Kendi, 2020).

Workshop Adaptation and Revision

The workshop developed by the California Community Colleges was designed for faculty across multiple institutions and included multiple phases. Given that we were piloting this workshop at one college, we decided to review the materials for our local context. We created the workshop application form to ask about prior knowledge of OER and anti-racist practices, which allowed us to better understand faculty motivation to participate. The information about the workshop and sign-up form was sent to the College's all-faculty listserv and requested that

department chairs approve faculty participation. Faculty at all ranks (lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor), status (part-time or full-time), and departments were encouraged to apply. We reviewed the applications to try to have a mix of participants in the program.

When adapting the workshop, the first thing we considered was what platform to use. The original one was in Canvas Commons with a Creative Commons license. The Learning Management System at Lehman College is Blackboard and is the most familiar to faculty at our institution. We debated the merits of using an open platform, such as the Academic Commons or Pressbooks. However, given the sensitive nature of the topics in the workshop, we decided to utilize Blackboard for the workshop to provide private space for reflection. We considered that this relates to balancing privacy and openness (Cronin, 2017). Using Blackboard also gave us access to VoiceThread, a tool that allows for audio and video discussion boards. Sherry had used VoiceThread in her classes previously and thought it might lend itself to asynchronous discussions in the workshop.

The process of importing a Canvas Commons cartridge into Blackboard was not as seamless as one might hope. However, this provided an opportunity for us to do a close review of the materials and assignments in the workshop to ensure these were the most appropriate for our context. We extended the amount of time that faculty had to participate in the workshop over the course of the semester.

We also looked for implicit whiteness in the course and where there might be spaces that privilege whiteness. This was apparent in some of the places where “we” was used and seemed to describe white participants in the workshop. Those sections were adapted to specify that white participants were meant rather than using “we” to describe the group. The authors also used this

as an example of how racism might unintentionally be present in the language of our coursework or practice.

Other adaptations to the workshop included updating the content. Due to the pandemic, the number of videos available increased as the Open Education conference was online and sessions were recorded and released with an open license. These recorded sessions helped broaden the materials in the workshop and also provided updated content related to how OER can center and include previously marginalized populations. Additionally, Stacy had authored and adapted relevant open resources that broached on issues of social justice and were grounded in our institutional context (Katz, 2019), and Sherry had piloted open assignments that subsequently informed the design of the workshop.

Impact and Feedback

As the college was still mostly remote, this was a challenging time for faculty. Despite extending the workshop to span the semester, participants felt the reading load was too much. We emphasized that faculty did not need to complete every reading and could follow their interests, but faculty felt they would like to read and watch everything in the workshop.

Despite feeling overwhelmed by the readings, faculty responded positively to the workshop surveys and their action plans reflected a desire to incorporate anti-racist open practices. Stacy helped to connect participants to opportunities in the larger open education community, such as one participant who joined a group for racially just STEM education. Another participant reflected that in their graduate-level Educational Leadership course, they had only selected largely white educational leaders to highlight. The faculty member asked the class to add names and links to the collection of leaders. Even though no credit was awarded for

participation, the class, composed of students of color, was eager to participate, and this led to “a diverse and fascinating list of people and sites to research and discuss.” This reflection shows the impact the workshop had on the faculty member, current students, and future students in the course.

Another participant shared “[participation in the workshop] wasn’t comfortable, but anti-racism conversations usually aren’t. I can’t quite articulate why, but the connection to OER, created a specific focal point that made anti-racism work a bit more grounded. It allowed us to focus on how personal beliefs and blindspots impacted our curriculum design.” The learning outcomes of the workshop are evident in the reflection, as it led to a deeper understanding of how to leverage open education for anti-racist action.

Discussion and Conclusion

This spring we began our second iteration of the OFAR workshop at our institution, building on the lessons learned during our pilot year. As we reflected on ways to strengthen the workshop, we solidified key takeaways and from those we offer three considerations for library faculty who might also endeavor to do this work.

First, our work on OFAR highlights the importance of “remixing” and “revising” the workshop to tailor it to the local institutional context. The student body and faculty at our home institution vary in some aspects from the original context. We undertook changes that drew on the diversity of our context, which, in turn, supported faculty in developing their own anti-racist OER goals and materials, which was highlighted in participant feedback. Second, we found that participants benefited from multimodal small group interactions. This was highlighted in the lively VoiceThread discussions. Small discussion groups both last year and this year requested we create VoiceThreads for their groups to use in lieu of synchronous meetings that can be

difficult to schedule or written discussion boards that can be less engaging. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for librarians to consider, we found our co-facilitation—as a librarian and social science faculty member and as people who occupy different social locations—to be an indispensable asset. This collaboration allows, for example, Stacy to share her deep knowledge of OER resources, and Sherry to share her knowledge of instructional technology and antiracist pedagogy. It is worth noting that one participant in the current OFAR session even made explicit mention of the positive impact of our co-facilitation model. In sum, as libraries seek to support broader institutional goals related to diversity, equity, and justice, the OFAR workshop provides one possible tool.

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