Foreword

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If open education is a philosophy about the ways in which people should produce, share, and build on knowledge then information literacy is surely key to advancing open educational practices. And yet, despite the self-evident value of both concepts, the uncritical advance of open education and information literacy risks not only limiting but also actively harming the shared goals of these movements. At the nexus of this tension lie the twin critical concepts of information privilege and information justice, respectively understood as “the ability to access information that others cannot”[i] and “the exclusion of perspectives of groups most affected by social injustice”[ii]. Threading this needle is critical information literacy, which “examine[s] information access and scholarly communication ‘through the lens of privilege’”[iii]. As Bergstrom-Lynch, Mahoney, and Thomas explain, in doing so it “goes a step further by explicitly situating information literacy within a broader context of power, privilege, and justice to understand and transform how information and knowledge production are shaped by social, economic, political, and cultural forces.”[iv]

Of course, these questions are also part of the critical discourse in the open education literature, as evidenced by two ground-breaking articles from a 2018 issue of the open access *Journal of Learning for Development*. In the first, Sarah Lambert investigates the degree to which the contemporary discourse in open education centered on questions of social justice.[v] In doing so she drew on the work of Keddie[vi], Fraser[vii], and Young[viii] to outline and apply the concepts of redistributive justice (allocation of material or human resources towards those who by circumstance have less), recognitive justice (recognition and respect for cultural and gender difference), and representational justice (equitable representation and political voice). For example, open education advocates often seek to encourage redistributive justice through the adoption of open educational resources (OER) as a means of widening equitable access to learning materials. Similarly, OER creators are increasingly working to intentionally tackle the problem of recognitive justice by diversifying the curriculum through including images, sounds, faces, case studies, places, and knowledges that have historically been excluded from their fields[ix]. And open pedagogues who already strive to decenter their authority by democratizing the process of knowledge creation are increasingly attentive to the importance of representational justice and, for example, the “co-construction of OER texts and resources about learners of colour by learners of colour, about women’s experiences by women, about gay experiences by gay identifying people.”[x] In other words, the vital importance of bringing “the universe into the university.”[xi]

The second article, co-authored by Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams and Henry Trotter, draws on Nancy Fraser’s conceptualization of social justice to develop and apply a critical framework for understanding open educational resources and practices in the Global South.[xii] In doing so, the authors helpfully point to three dimensions (economic, social, and political) along which injustices must be redressed while also distinguishing between responses to injustice that are...
merely ameliorative (such as a redistribution of resources) and those that are truly transformative (such as a restructuring the economic model).

Maha Bali, Catherine Cronin, and I later built on and extended the Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter framework to encompass the broader universe of open educational practices (OEP; including open pedagogy) to demonstrate how these too may function as ameliorative or transformative responses to injustice (e.g., increasing the representation of diverse identities and marginalized groups vs. centering marginal voices and challenging the dominant discourse, with decision-making done by marginalized groups). However, we go further to illustrate how an uncritical embrace of OEP may have neutral or even negative effects (e.g., if implemented without learner agency, by exploiting student labor, or without consideration of the unevenly distributed risks of public scholarship). We provide a typology of OEP, giving examples of practices across a continuum of openness and along three axes: content-centric to process-centric, teacher-centric to learner-centric, and practices that are primarily for pedagogical purposes to primarily for social justice.

Threads of these conversations continue, blend, and extend into the present volume. This is encouraging to those of us who wear scars from past battles with the elitism of the academy and who actively seek to dismantle the paywalls and structural gatekeeping that is a defining feature of the architecture of the ivory tower. At the same time, it begs the question of why these critical conversations are only now entering the mainstream and whether the lack of diversity that still characterizes both librarianship and scholarship has devalued and dismissed these concerns or even rendered them entirely invisible.

In a recently-published collection of 38 critical perspectives on open education, Maha Bali, Catherine Cronin, Laura Czerniewicz, Robin DeRosa and I observe how this movement has mercifully advanced beyond its initial northern-centrism and is increasingly being challenged from its own periphery. But it is the very marginality of these diverse perspectives that demonstrate why questions about equity, social justice, and power relations need to be reasserted at this time.

We draw inspiration from bell hooks who observed that:

[M]arginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation; in fact...it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality... as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

It is in the imagining of a radical new world that I see the potential for social justice in the deep structure of both open education and information literacy. Let’s consider this through the lens of the ACRL framework for information literacy...


**Authority is Constructed and Contextual**

From the invisibilizing of racialized and contingent faculty to the glorification of what Freire described as the banking model of education, authority continues to costume hegemony within the academy. Conversely, open pedagogy shines the house lights on this theatre, as it decents imagined authority while enabling students to shape the public knowledge commons of which they are a part. In valuing the lived experiences of learners, open pedagogy does more than just diversify the curriculum. As Goodsett explains, it promotes humanization and opposition to injustice, reclaiming space for both cognitive and representational justice. In doing so, open pedagogy draws on critical pedagogy, reflecting both its opposition to authoritarianism and its emphasis on learner agency. As Bergstrom-Lynch et al. eloquently articulate, “by offering students the opportunity to create public scholarship . . . we are providing a space for students to realize their intellectual agency, challenge traditional ideas of authority, insert new voices into scholarly communications, and reduce disparities in information access beyond the academy.” And yet, even the desire to diversify, decolonize, and address information justice can perpetrate harm, as in the case of sensitive traditional knowledge wherein legal rights are not always reflective of moral obligations.

**Information Creation as a Process**

Creating, adapting, and even using OER helps demystify the process of knowledge creation; its messy and chaotic nature becoming especially evident to learners who are invited to participate in renewable assignments and other forms of open pedagogy. But whereas open pedagogy frees the practice of open education from a product, it is in the exhibition of the process that the power dynamics that underpin learning are affectively revealed. For example, for faculty, adopting an openness to openness in teaching practice can be intimidating as it requires overcoming a fear of being judged, scooped, or otherwise penalized. But for empowered students permitted a sense of ownership over their learning process, it is the recognition that their (oft-devalued) intellectual efforts do in fact add value to the world that is a source of enduring pride. It is this “spark of magical engagement” that catalyzes a deeper investment in one’s own learning and growth, something that reaps dividends through the development of information literacies and metaliteracies necessary for life-long learning. As Bond succinctly puts it, “to any thoughtful educator . . . teaching facts will be a poor substitute for teaching people how to learn.”

**Information Has Value**

Arce and Grossman recognize that students’ experiences with the high cost of course materials have accustomed them to considering the value of information. As an open education advocate, this is why I meet with curiosity queries from faculty who wonder whether students who receive free resources will adequately value them (a hypothesis that has in fact been tested). The system-justifying intent of this seemingly innocent question is illuminated through the conspicuous absence of its obverse: Do those who enjoy information privilege recognize its true worth?
Adopting an institutional lens, Gillis helpfully describes how traditional holders of information such as galleries, libraries, archives, and museums too grapple with the question of value as this sector increasingly overcomes a fear of competition or loss of control in order to more meaningfully benefit from the enhanced reputation, fulfilled mandates for access, and increased exposure that come from openly licensing digital collections\textsuperscript{xxviii}.

In broad terms, one might posit that open education and information literacy jointly support the replacement of a deficit-based pedagogy of scarcity with a growth-oriented pedagogy of abundance\textsuperscript{xxix}. But as compelling as this argument appears, it must be interrogated through a social justice lens. For example, there has been a growing recognition of the labour in open education and librarianship—much of it uncompensated, invisible, and gendered—that serves as a counter-current to transformative change. As O’Reilly, Seal, and Young put it, “without critique, an overly positive framing of “open” serves to conceal labor dynamics, as well as political and economic agendas within the academy.”\textsuperscript{xxx}

\textbf{Research as Inquiry}

One may intuitively appreciate how inquiry supports the creation of OER or even how OER can help advance research\textsuperscript{xxxi}. But a more radical transformation occurs when learners are challenged to engage in “renewable” assignments that enjoy a larger audience, longer life, and greater impact\textsuperscript{xxxii}, when educators create “a space for authentic student inquiry, attributed contributions to public knowledge, legitimate participation in scholarly communities of practice, and the emergence of information literacies beyond what faculty anticipated.”\textsuperscript{xxxiii} When these assignments involve building on OER they invite not just documentation and attribution but also critical reflection into the curation and adaptation process\textsuperscript{xxxiv}.

Take for example the first edition of \textit{The Open Anthology of Earlier American Literature}, which was produced by undergraduate students and alumni at Plymouth State University working under the leadership of Robin DeRosa. This project initially involved building a skeleton, curating and excerpting readings from the public domain, modernizing the spelling, and writing introductions to each reading. But the students went much further... Buoyed by a burgeoning sense of pride and ownership that often accompanies open pedagogy, they produced short films, discussion questions, and assignments related to the primary texts DeRosa described this as a shift in dynamic “to an inquiry-based model (they converse with me and with the text, altering both my thinking and the text itself with their contributions).”\textsuperscript{xxxv} This process of inquiry has since continued, with scholars from across the United States expanding and further enhancing the text for use in Early American Literature survey courses\textsuperscript{xxxvi}.

\textbf{Scholarship as Conversation}

As Goodsett observes, the intended audience of open pedagogical work is a discourse community. However, the conversation of scholarship often begins with the community that is built within the classroom\textsuperscript{xxxvii} as the process of learning is itself encouraged to take place in full view of one’s peers. In cases where open pedagogy occurs on public platforms such as Wikipedia\textsuperscript{xxxviii}, “the interplay of technology, student-driven learning, and community-building
overlap in open pedagogy, resulting in powerful learning experiences with meaning beyond the classroom for students.  

And yet, exploration of these exciting possibilities in the absence of criticality would not only be irresponsible but even dangerous, as students must be properly informed of the risks and responsibilities associated with public scholarship. They must understand not only their intellectual property rights and copyright risk but also data privacy and the implications of their digital footprint, conversations that librarians are well equipped to lead. As Liljequist and Strosser point out, the intention here should not be to erect obstacles within the learning process but rather to bridge gaps in information literacy. Although this process requires ongoing engagement, it enables faculty to invite students into “transformative engagement” with scholarly communities of practice.

Arce and Grossman draw on the important work of Cynthia Mari Orozco to point out that: open pedagogy cannot be truly transformative, let alone ethical, if the student-creators do not understand the implications of open. She advocates for the integration of information literacy instruction into open pedagogical practice as a way to facilitate the understanding needed for students to participate in what she calls “informed open practice.”

 Searching as Strategic Exploration
One benefit of challenging presumed authority—whether through curating OER or inverting classroom power dynamics—is the increasing obviousness that the traditional, top-down, banking model of learning is as harmful and wrong as it is neat and tidy. When engaging in open pedagogy this metacognitive shift is encouraged further as, for example, students writing and editing articles in Wikipedia become more fully aware of and even actively work to counter that platform’s amplification of inequalities. Indeed, it is through Freirean praxis or conscientious action that information literacy may be wielded as a counterhegemonic force, including through collection development policies.

Take the inspiring example of Swart, who not only identified false narratives in encyclopedias and databases but took it upon herself to write the database vendors to request corrections, which were almost always made. Her brilliant suggestion is to design course assignments for students in which they identify and work to remedy what she describes as fossilized propaganda, all while openly licensing and sharing their letters to vendors. This is a spectacular example of both representational justice (Lambert) and a transformative response (Hodgkinson-Williams and Trotter). As a critical pedagogical approach it calls to mind bell hooks, who wrote: “my commitment to engaged pedagogy is an expression of political activism.”

Conclusion
The present volume is timely not only because it models creative and effective strategies to advance both open education and information literacy, but especially because it poses critical questions and urges practitioners to go well beyond questions of access to and the use of
information. It demands reflection on what is being accessed (and what is not), who is gaining access (and who is not), who is providing access (and who is not), and what the goal is of this access (and what lies beyond access). It reveals the many different dimensions of information justice while also demonstrating that neither open education nor information literacy are by themselves necessarily just. As valuable as it is, the ACRL framework can terribly and easily be used to uphold the dominant hegemony. This is why we—as educators and librarians—must shed the too-comfortable cloak of neutrality to give voice to that which has been silenced⁵, to invite those who have been excluded, and to lead with courage and conviction. The dream of an equitable future depends on it.

Notes
[i] Swart, “Critical Librarianship and Open Education: A Solution to Information Injustice.”

[ii] Bergstrom-Lynch, Mahoney, and Thomas, “Doing Away with the ‘Curricular Black Box’: Empowering Students as OER Creators to Challenge Information Privilege.”

[iii] Bergstrom-Lynch, Mahoney, and Thomas, “Doing Away with the ‘Curricular Black Box’.”

[iv] Bergstrom-Lynch, Mahoney, and Thomas, “Doing Away with the ‘Curricular Black Box’.”


Bibliography


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¹ Chapter 11: Kathy Swart, Critical Librarianship and Open Education: A Solution to Information Injustice
² Chapter 12: Yolanda Bergstrom-Lynch, Mary Mahoney, and Joelle Thomas, Doing Away with the “Curricular Black Box”: Empowering Students as OER Creators to Challenge Information Privilege
³ Chapter 12: Yolanda Bergstrom-Lynch, Mary Mahoney, and Joelle Thomas, Doing Away with the “Curricular Black Box”: Empowering Students as OER Creators to Challenge Information Privilege
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Chapter 11: Swart, Critical Librarianship and Open Education: A Solution to Information Injustice

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