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Where OER & DEI Connect: Intersections that Matter

Heather Blicher, Keynote
Affordable Learning PA Summit
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Slide 1:

Hello everyone. I'm honored to be here today for what I understand is the first in-person Affordable Learning Summit since 2020. Full disclosure, this my first in-person presentation since 2019.

The landscape of education is rapidly changing, and has been changing for quite some time. With increasing demand for affordable and accessible educational materials, Open Educational Resources continue to be a valuable alternative to traditional textbooks.

Today, I want to take this further, to go beyond affordability and access...to include where OER and diversity, equity, and inclusion connect. There is a growing recognition of the value of diversity in all forms and that bias and discrimination exist in education, healthcare, criminal justice...essentially everywhere. While governments have implemented policies and initiatives to promote DEI efforts, for example, anti-discrimination laws, we're also seeing DEI-focused laws, policies, and initiatives be completely shutdown.

Slide 2:

I'm Heather Blicher- she/her pronouns

I've worked in public and academic libraries for almost two decades- starting out part-time at a public reference desk and eventually honing in on online learning and OER about 9 years ago. This January I accepted an entry level position at Virginia Tech so that I could focus on the parts of OER I wasn't able to in previous positions- mostly digital publishing. And about 2 years ago, I started working with Open Oregon Educational Resources in a grant-funded role as an equity consultant and instructional designer. I took on these roles because I wanted to stay relevant and keep learning- and I wasn't getting that from my position then.

All of that is to say, I do not have it all figured out yet. My career path is up in the air and I don't know what's coming next. Until January, my positions involving OER included a lot of responsibilities to juggle and squeezing in OER where I was able. I recognize that many of us working with OER have that same struggle. And perhaps that's a topic we can continue talking about together.

Slide 3:

Before I launch into my content, I'd like to get to know you a little more, so in the theme of the character Moira from a television show called, "Schitt's Creek," I'd like you to take a quick poll and share what is your level of experience working with diversity, equity, and inclusion.



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If you scan the QR code with your camera, then click on the link that appears on your screen, it should lead you to the poll. I'll give you a minute to pull this up.

How's everyone doing, okay? Let's see the live results...

And for those who aren't familiar with Schitt's Creek, let's talk after.

Slide 4:

I have three objectives for this presentation. That you will be able to:

- define DEI and describe the importance of it in education
- explain how DEI intersects with OER, and
- incorporate DEI into your work with equity tools

I will share these slides after the presentation, so please know that you'll have access to all links.

Slide 5:

The foundation of OER is affordability and bonus points- it empowers educators to have more control over their course materials.

Now, we want to enhance OER by incorporating DEI

I have talked with colleagues who say this is too much, that we need to continue to focus on affordability. Of course, we need to continue to focus on affordability, but why can't we do both? Don't we already incorporate accessibility in our OER? That's DEI. Why can't we center affordability and add DEI-focused measures as a part of the process?

Slide 6:

OER is not automatically diverse, inclusive, or equitable. We have to make it that way.

And the only way to do that is to be intentional.

Slide 7:

I'd like to take 1 minute to see what you think of when you think about the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion. Everyone ready?

Okay, 1 minute starts now

Slide 8:

These terms are often lumped together and the individual meanings can be lost.

Diversity is the variety of characteristics that make up individuals' unique identities, including race, gender, age, ethnicity, body size, abilities, and the list goes on.

Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of marginalized



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groups of people. Inclusion refers to creating a culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging and is valued for their perspectives and contributions. Together, diversity, equity, and inclusion are a set of principles that can guide us in understanding how to value and leverage the differences between people to foster anti-oppressive environments.

Slide 9:

Understanding our personal identities gives us a deeper appreciation of the complexities of DEI. Now, I'm a member of Generation X, right on the cusp of being a millennial. I don't want to speak for all Gen Xers, but most of us don't like labels. We resist them because we don't want to be put into a category where our existence is generalized or stereotyped. We want to capture the complexity and diversity of our experiences and beliefs.

This is an icebreaker activity where students complete their iceberg for visible and invisible characteristics (it's been used with a variety of ages, from elementary school to graduate students). The goal is to support students in finding connections based on similarities and differences, those characteristics, attributes, experiences or beliefs that make them who they are. There is so much under the surface to recognize, celebrate, and promote understanding.

Slide 10:

It's no secret that we live in a society where centuries of discrimination have contributed to the structural inequalities we see today. But if we're aware of the challenges, we can do better. Championing the transformative power of education and the knowledge that results can contribute to the dismantling of systemic barriers and prejudices, the amplification of marginalized voices and reach towards an overarching goal to create a more inclusive and equitable society

Slide 11:

This image is from a high school history textbook under the "Patterns of Immigration" chapter. The text referred to the slave trade as a pattern of immigration that brought millions of **workers** to work on agricultural plantations. It talked about European indentured servants, but not African slaves.

While this was a commercial textbook and not OER, it's a good example of how biases can have a negative impact on the materials our students study and learn from...and perhaps outside forces have an effect as well. A colleague told me she had seen a progression of photos from this textbook showing nuanced changes over several years. I wasn't able to find these photos or changes, but I did find mention that:

- the textbook only acknowledged when white people were exploited
- it intentionally distanced plantation owners from deplorable acts
- and in general and not specific to one history textbook, the Texas board of education suggested American slavery was a minor issue
- and school board members didn't want to mention Jim Crow laws

We have a responsibility to not only provide affordable materials, but also to ensure the content is accurate. You may think that something this egregious couldn't happen working with an educator that cares enough about their students and their area of study to engage in the time-consuming process of creating OER...but it does happen and I've been a part of some tough conversations with authors to point out those issues.



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Slide 12:

In my role as an equity consultant, I center the use of an equity lens in all of my work.

Ida B. Wells, a Black journalist, activist, and researcher in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, said, “The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.” Using an equity lens means shining a light on the nuances of language and content in educational materials that can intentionally or unintentionally promote inaccurate information that leads to more oppression, social injustice, and disparities we live with today.

An equity lens promotes respectful conversations and genuine dialogue that can bridge gaps. It recognizes different opinions and perspectives, but pushes for mutual understanding.

Slide 13: N/A

Slide 14:

Access is something I think we’re all familiar with.

The availability of openly licensed materials can reduce barriers to education and support students from diverse backgrounds who may face barriers to education due to financial, geographic, or other reasons.

Slide 15:

OER can address representation gaps in educational materials. By incorporating diverse perspectives, cultures, and identities into OER content, it can foster a more inclusive learning environment and provide students with materials that resonate with their experiences

Slide 16:

OER can be used to promote cultural competency and to help educators and students develop an understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences. By providing materials that reflect a range of cultures, languages, and experiences, OER can help promote empathy, understanding, and inclusion.

Slide 17:

OER can empower educators and students to participate in the creation, adaptation, and sharing of resources. The inclusion of open pedagogy can encourage diverse voices and perspectives be included. OER can also be customized to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities or students who speak languages other than English. This can help ensure that all students have access to the materials.

Slide 18: N/A

Slide 19:

This is the second quote I’ve included that highlights the importance of being intentional. Use these equity tools to examine the content and the way it's presented to ensure that it is inclusive and respectful of all individuals.

Slide 20:

Language is continually evolving and it can be difficult to keep up. Find an inclusive language guide to refer back to. This guide is from Oregon Health and Science University’s Center for Diversity and Inclusion.



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Slide 21:

PFLAG is another great resource. PFLAG is the first and largest organization dedicated to supporting, educating, and advocating for LGBTQ+ people and their families.

Slide 22:

Imagery. There are so many wonderful image collections and repositories that focus on diversity and inclusivity. This is a screenshot of an article with a listing of these resources, though not an exhaustive list because more are built every day. Collections like Disabled and Here, The Gender Spectrum Collection and AllGo Plus size (which is also now included in Unsplash) are some of my favorites as they offer free images for use that show diverse individuals living their lives in everyday situations, not only marching in protest, for example.

Slide 23:

I work with an amazing instructional designer with Open Oregon. Veronica Vold created many of these linked documents. The course map helps to make connections between learning outcomes and course elements, allowing the instructor to see how each part of the course fits together in support of the whole in preparation for teaching.

The equity-minded course review checklist is deliberately short because we want it to be actionable for instructors. It was adapted from the Peralta Online Equity Rubric and the OSCQR Rubric from SUNY Online. The course review checklist incorporates principles of Open Pedagogy, Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Accessibility, which I'll cover briefly in a moment..

Even though I'm not an instructional designer at VA Tech, in my librarian role, I've found myself using inclusive design principles working with professors creating OER!

Slide 24:

Open pedagogy is a course design approach that prioritizes student access and agency in the process of creating knowledge. With open pedagogy, students can be collaborators and creators.

Slide 25:

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of 3 design principles that focus on learner variability. UDL recognizes that students possess different strengths and challenges and designs for flexibility and student agency, rather than assuming one size fits all. Designing with UDL means designing for 1) multiple forms of student engagement, 2) multiple forms of content representation, and 3) multiple forms of student action and expression in course work.

CAST is a nonprofit research and development organization that created the UDL framework and Guidelines.

Slide 26:

Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) is a design practice that strips out any hidden curriculum (like what's involved with writing a research paper? how will I be graded? can my discussion posts be two sentences long, or should they be 10?). TILT ensures that educators explain the purpose, tasks, and criteria for success for the work students are asked to perform.

Slide 27:



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Culturally Responsive Teaching means that educators value diverse cultural backgrounds and diverse student experiences in a classroom as assets rather than deficits.

This is a set of frameworks that strives to help students **to see diversity as strength**, to respond directly to inequities in existing social systems, and to help students to build and express critical thinking skills. In the image here, Veronica included a vessel and a fire because this demonstrates how culturally responsive educators engage with the learning process. Rather than make deposits of knowledge into students, as one would fill up a vessel, culturally responsive educators aim to **light up** a student's lived experiences, questions, and interests in the world.

Slide 28:

And of course we need to focus on principles of accessibility. The BCcampus Accessibility Toolkit has been a great help to me- and even though I consider myself well-versed in accessibility, I've found new-to-me information like how to include long image descriptions in Pressbooks when the characters for your alt text go above 125. This is a fantastic way to understand that value of including alt text, avoiding color to denote meaning, and using document structures.

Slide 29:

This is not a tool, but more of a suggestion. Start small and find ways to include diverse stakeholders! These perspectives will have an impact on the final product.

Slide 30:

Provide training and support. DEI is still a growing area...you don't have to know it all to support DEI-infused OER work. I'm trying to figure out how to approach this in my new position at Tech. And it will start small.

Slide 31:

And if my list of equity tools didn't tell you, because I'm a librarian, I often find myself filling many roles... even before I took on the part-time roles with Open Oregon. When I introduced myself, I talked about juggling multiple roles.

We're often expected to be not only the librarian, but also the instructional designer, the accessibility specialist, and pick any other specialty... and just fill in the blank.

While it would be ideal to have an actual dream team of individuals working together, that isn't always possible. And I know many of you are juggling these multiple roles just like I am.

Slide 32:

With that in mind, I want to leave you with some homework. Over lunch, during a break, or back at your institution, in small groups, I invite you to read, reflect, and write on these questions for 5 quiet minutes. After the 5 minutes, you have the option to share. Only share what you're comfortable or compelled to share. If you choose not to share, that's completely fine too.

The goal of this activity is to:

- Build community by encouraging consideration of social identities and shared experiences

Slide 33:

- And then I want you to think about how you bring your identity into your OER work
- And what is the scope of change possible with the constraints of your situation.

We want to do it all...sometimes we have to do it all. Start small and do what feels possible. Don't take it



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all on by yourself. Look to your community, your colleagues, friends. Embrace the new connections you make today and encourage each other in how you can start to incorporate DEI into your OER work.