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Open Pedagogy in Practice: Designing Learning Circles for Professional Development

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Abstract

In 2022, the Open Education Network (OEN) hired an open pedagogy fellow to create short-term learning circles focused on open pedagogy as part of their strategic planning. The circles were to offer more professional development opportunities and resources that anyone could use and adapt. This Innovative Practices piece covers the design, implementation, and assessment of the learning circle from its pilot round to the present day and provides instructions on how to use the curriculum at your own institution. The authors also share all openly licensed curriculum resources needed to implement learning circles.

Introduction

As the open education movement matures, the problem of overworked librarians and faculty trying to navigate licensing concerns and nuanced considerations within open educational practices remains. It is in this space that the Open Education Network (OEN) seeks to create resources and professional development opportunities that are openly licensed and can be taken, adapted, and used wherever needed. A specific need in the OEN community that has arisen over the last decade surrounds supporting open pedagogy. Specifically, how can the OEN help faculty understand what open pedagogy

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is, and how can faculty engage with open pedagogy in ways that center student voices and transform learning into a more inclusive and equitable practice? One way the OEN decided to address this need was to create and implement Open Pedagogy Learning Circles for instructors and instructional partners and to conduct a workshop that equips attendees to take the curriculum and use it in their own institutional setting.

Context of the Open Education Network (OEN)

Dave Ernst started the Open Textbook Library (OTL) in 2012 at the University of Minnesota to make finding open textbooks easier for faculty, and he launched an accompanying workshop encouraging faculty to consider open textbooks for their courses (Ernst, 2020). His interest and work in expanding the use of open textbooks was a direct response to escalating textbook costs in higher education and the negative impact on students' academic success, especially on those who were most financially vulnerable. In 2014, as more institutions became interested in the OTL and workshop, Ernst announced the creation of the Open Textbook Network to provide a space for institutions to talk with each other about open education.

In 2020, the Open Textbook Network became the Open Education Network (OEN), a new name that better reflected the broad scope of the community. In the nine years since the OEN's inception, open education has matured beyond discussion of course material costs to embrace a host of open educational practices that seek to make education more inclusive and equitable. One of the open educational practices that the OEN community has sought help with is open pedagogy, a practice enabled by the five Rs of Creative Commons' licensing: retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute (Wiley, 2014). During strategic planning in the fall of 2021, OEN staff decided they would invest time creating a variety of professional development opportunities and resources around open pedagogy. The opportunities and resources would be openly licensed for anyone to use and adapt the materials for their own campus; OEN staff labeled this work "The Open Pedagogy Pathway."

Hiring the OEN Fellow

The OEN hired Amanda Larson from The Ohio State University as the 2022-2023 OEN fellow to create short-term learning circles focusing on open pedagogy as a way to meet member needs by providing low-stakes engagement with open pedagogy. The OEN fellow and the OEN's director for educational programs met regularly for a year to research and discuss best practices in designing learning circles and engaging educators in open pedagogy. The OEN fellow built the curriculum with accessibility and inclusivity at the forefront. Hiring the OEN fellow was in addition to a year-long certificate program funded by a Laura Bush 21st Century Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services that pairs faculty with librarians to transform curriculum through the power of open pedagogy.

Defining Open Pedagogy

Part of the perceived nebulousness of open pedagogy is how to define it, and definitions abound. Sometimes it is too closely defined as open educational practices (OEP) which are usually thought of as "a broad descriptor that includes the creation, use and reuse of [open educational resources (OER)], open pedagogies, and open sharing of teaching practices" (Cronin, 2017). Others like BC Campus (2020) highlight an emphasis on student agency as co-creators by explaining that "when you use open pedagogy in your classroom, you are inviting your students to be part of the teaching process, participating in the co-creation of knowledge." Casey et al. (2022) do an excellent job of bringing most of the definitions tossed around the open education community together, explaining open pedagogy as "a set of teaching practices built on the foundation of the open education community's shared values, including but not limited to student agency, sharing, diversity and inclusion, peer learning, renewable assignments, co-creation/collaboration, and active/experiential learning" (para 1). This definition pulls together different descriptions to get at the heart of doing the work of open pedagogy. Additionally, Wiley and Hilton (2018) suggest asking four questions to ensure the pedagogy in which you are engaging is actually open:

1. Are students asked to create new artifacts (essays, poems, videos, songs, etc.) or revise/remix existing OER?
2. Does the new artifact have value beyond supporting the learning of its author?
3. Are students invited to publicly share their new artifacts or revised/remixed OER?
4. Are students invited to openly license their new artifacts or revised/remixed OER?

Some commonly discussed examples of open pedagogy are faculty inviting students to edit a Wikipedia article (Villeneuve, 2018), co-writing a syllabus with faculty (Nelson, 2019), collaborative social annotation (Brown & Croft, 2020), and creating quiz and exam questions to be used by future classes (Jhangiani, 2018). At the center of open pedagogy is student-created learning with a focus on student agency as scholars and creators of knowledge in their own right. As indicated by Katz and Van Allen (2022), many faculty are unaware of how to implement open educational practices such as open pedagogy with equity in mind, but Lambert (2018) suggests the appropriate use of open educational practices can engage faculty with redistributive, recognitive, and representational justice within their classroom. Before faculty feel comfortable with reimagining their classroom instruction through the power of open pedagogy, they need basic information about OER, the *why* behind open pedagogy, and how they might possibly begin. Learning circles provide an ideal entry point for this type of learning.

Why Learning Circles?

We drew heavily from Sinkinson and McAndrew's (2020) chapter "Approaching Open Pedagogy in Community and Collaboration" in Clifton and Davies Hoffman's (2021) *Open Pedagogy Approaches*. We are also admirers of North Carolina State University's Open Pedagogy Incubator as well as Minnesota State System's successful Learning Circle model created by Karen Pikula (Open Education Network, 2020). We realized we needed to create a brave space where a community of learners could

come together to envision learning through the lens of open pedagogy (Arao & Clemens, 2013). Additionally, since the OEN already offers a year-long Certificate in Open Pedagogy, we wanted a shorter-term professional development solution: a seven-week long Open Pedagogy Learning Circle.

Overview of Open Pedagogy Learning Circles

We consulted many sources that suggested we keep the learning circle small at 10 to 12 participants. According to Learning Circles: A Train-the-Trainer Approach, "Learning Circles are small gatherings of people who come together to share their ideals, goals, practices and experiences. Learning Circles are conducted in open neutral environments where participants can create dialogue and exchange ideas on any topic" (Bonner Curriculum, n.d.). In addition, we realized that we wanted to bring a somewhat predictable structure to each of the seven weeks; this was done by scaffolding the learning to build participants' confidence with engaging in open pedagogy, modelling the use of software common to open pedagogy so that each participant could walk away with their own open pedagogy toolkit, and implementing a final project for each learning circle participant to show what they know. We utilized a simple Google form as an application, and we sent out a call for applications indicating that we were looking for a total of 12 participants from OEN member institutions. The form also indicated that we were hoping for a combination of instructors/faculty, librarians, instructional designers, or other roles that directly support faculty in pedagogy-related concerns.

In the pilot session, we received over 30 applications and admitted a group of 18 instructional faculty and instructional partners (instructional designers, librarians, administrators, etc.), which provided a rich cross-section of experience for both participants and facilitators. Also, attrition by participants made it so that there were usually only eight to 10 learners for the sessions, which contributed to a comfortable and engaged learning environment. The makeup of participant roles remained consistent within the follow-up cohorts as did the recruitment strategy. Following the pilot, the participant groups have continued to be made up on average of seven to 10 instructors from various disciplines and three to five instructional partners, including librarians, instructional designers, Center for Teaching and Learning staff, and others whose main role does not include teaching a for-credit course. As with the pilot round, this fusion of participants was essential to generating robust discussion amongst the group. Likewise, the co-mingling of disciplines, instructors, and instructional partner participants led to valuable insights and advice from each participant based on their individualized experiences at their institutions and their areas of expertise.

Designing the Curriculum

The development of the learning circle curriculum presented a challenging undertaking given our aim to furnish participants with a comprehensive understanding of open pedagogy, as well as engaging them in practical application. By providing hands-on experience, we enabled attendees to enhance their ability to assist students or instructors at their respective institutions, merging their subject matter expertise with open pedagogy proficiency. In addition, there were several other challenges to undertake to bring the pilot learning circle and curriculum to fruition:

- Creating a holistic experience in which participants could bring their authentic selves to the learning process.
- Creating a curriculum that accounted for multiple audiences: facilitators running the learning circle experience, instructors interested in open pedagogy, and instructional partners who would support instructors in the future.
- Creating ways for participants to create community within a specific timeframe.

The best solution was to design a curriculum that could be a modular and customizable tool for future facilitators with sets of materials intended for each audience group. The curriculum is provided in two openly licensed formats—a Canvas course and a Google Drive Folder. It includes guidance on how to use the curriculum, seven-session modules, and facilitator resources like email and slide templates. The topics covered in the curriculum are: What is Open Pedagogy?; Traditional vs. Renewable Assignments; Consent in the Classroom, Building Brave Spaces, and Engaging in Care in the Open; Accessibility, Scaffolding, and Universal Design for Learning; Open Pedagogy, Social Justice, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; a Tools Showcase. The last session is a show and tell in which participants share the renewable assignment or digital learning object they made throughout the learning circle. Each session module contains prework, renewable assignment or digital learning object instructions for that week, a featured tool of the week, further resources on the topics covered, and a "what's next" section that previews the next week's session.

The sessions are designed to run one hour, and in the facilitated pilot experience, follow a similar format each week. For the pilot version, we incorporated Mentimeter as our polling software to engage with participants. Mentimeter is an interactive presentation platform that allows creation or upload of a slide deck, users can add interactive elements like polls, quizzes, word clouds, rankings, and open ended questions. (Note: The presentation creation tool is called Mentimeter. The tool participants join is called Menti.). Participants join the Menti through a QR code or Menti.com link where they put in a presentation code. After joining, they can participate throughout the presentation by engaging with the interactives the presenter has included. We encourage other facilitators to use their favorite polling software or what they have available to them at their institution.

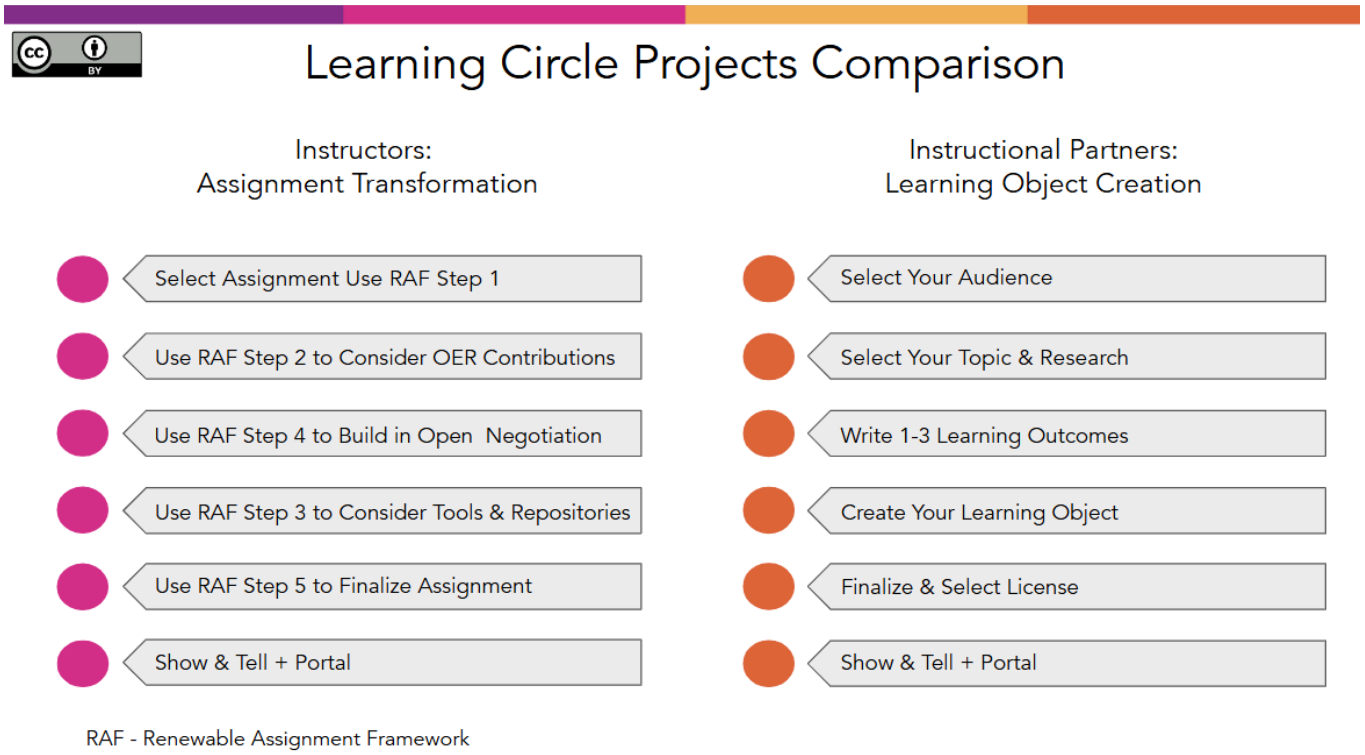
Once participants join the Menti, each session starts with a temperature check activity to assess how participants are feeling. This is followed by an opening activity that offers a fun question to help build community among participants. Next is a brief presentation of the concept covered that week and an activity that pairs with that topic, then another temperature check activity to see how participants are feeling after the session. Finally, the session includes a closing activity that assesses what participants have learned by asking them, "What's one concept that [you] are taking with [you] this week?" This is followed by a brief wrap-up of the session that includes necessary details for next week, assignment reminders, and pre-work information. While the curriculum was presented in a virtual format in the pilot experience, we offer tips for facilitating an in-person version of the learning circle experience.

The Learning Circle Projects

The curriculum includes a scaffolded open pedagogy project so participants can truly understand the implementation of open pedagogy. Instructor participants complete the assignment transformation project in which they transform a traditional assignment from their course into a renewable assignment they can implement in future versions of their course. Instructional partners complete a learning object creation project in which they create a learning object that explains an open pedagogy topic for the audience of their choice. Both projects are scaffolded over the first six weeks of the learning circle experience.

Figure 1

Learning Circle Projects Comparison



Note. Instructors and instructional partners work on very different learning circle projects throughout the seven week sessions, but both are invited to share what they created in the show and tell session.

As seen in Figure 1, the assignment transformation project walks instructor participants through Katz and Van Allen's (2020) Renewable Assignment Framework (RAF) step by step in an order that makes sense for the learning circle curriculum. In week two, participants will select the traditional assignment they want to transform and use step one of RAF to assess it. Once their assessment is complete, in week three, they will engage in step two of RAF by investigating whether there are any existing OER that would make a meaningful contribution to the new version of the assignment. Following the assessments in the previous weeks, week four brings the challenge of step four of RAF to build in a place for intentional negotiation for openness into the assignment. This draws heavily on the

topical content of the week that focuses on care for students when they are working in *open* and honoring their decision to consent to work in *open* or not. In week five, they will focus on step three of RAF to consider what tools or repository will fit the pedagogical needs of their students for the assignment. In week six, participants will use step five of RAF as guidance for finalizing their assignment redesign and prepping for week seven's show and tell session.

The learning object creation project, also seen in Figure 1, walks instructional partners through designing a learning object that explains an open pedagogy topic for the audience of their choice; ideally, a learning object they can reuse in their local institutional context. In week two, instructional partners decide who the intended audience is for their learning object. Next, they spend week three researching the topic they would like the learning object to cover. In week four, they are charged with writing one to three learning objectives for the project. Following that, week five asks them to consider the final format for their learning object. In week six, they finalize their learning object and prepare what they will share in the show and tell session in week seven.

How to Use the Curriculum

To get started, we recommend reading the How to Use This Curriculum document, the facilitator handouts, and the Canvas modules. This provides a sense of the scope of what is covered in the curriculum and how to set up a learning circle at your institution. It includes instructions for designing a call for participants, options for facilitating either virtual or in-person learning circles, email templates, and assessment strategies.

Tools, Training, and Consultations

Over the last decade, the prevalence and use of digital learning tools in higher education have grown exponentially, with a burst of increased use initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Pandya et al. 2021). Educators use technologically supported learning environments to innovate their pedagogy and integrate new learning approaches (Aljawarneh, 2020). The convergence of digital learning tools with open pedagogy furthers educators' abilities to experiment pedagogically. As a result, digital learning tools played a large role in the design of the Learning Circle on Open Pedagogy.

Implementation of Digital Learning Tools in the Learning Circle

Throughout the learning circle, digital learning tools were incorporated to provide additional support in the development and design of participants' renewable assignments or digital learning objects. In addition to the use of our polling software Mentimeter, each of the weekly sessions featured a specific tool for participants to explore and consider for their individual projects, as well as an entire session dedicated to discussing additional tools available openly. A documentation guide was also created to provide the educational and pedagogical context for which each tool might be used, outside links to user instructions and materials, and a difficulty rating. Feedback on the incorporation of tools and the documentation guide was well-received.

It is also essential to note that certain learning tools may need institutional approval before being incorporated into a course or assignment. As each tool is discussed and experimented with during the learning circle, participants are reminded that their institutional context may warrant the use of different and/or similar learning tools not featured that may already be available to them, or they may have the infrastructure set up at their institutions. It is crucial for participants to be aware of their own situations so they can make the necessary decisions regarding which learning tools are available and appropriate for their students.

The importance of providing training on the use of new learning tools and learning design cannot be understated. Recent studies and literature reviews regarding teacher professional development (TPD), technology enhanced learning (TEL), and information and communications technology (ICT) have shown the importance of training teachers to be digitally competent and capable of using technology (Dagnino et al., 2018; Fernández-Batanero et al., 2020). TPD is not only essential for incorporating learning tools into new pedagogical approaches, but it is also essential for implementing a training structure for students who will be interacting with these new tools and technologies (Asenio-Perez, 2017). The learning circle gave us the opportunity to provide abbreviated training on several different learning tools, innovative learning design, and pedagogical uses. The design of the learning circle also took into consideration the aforementioned need to provide a training structure for students who will be the end-users of the newly transformed renewable assignments by scaffolding the types of tools highlighted, their pedagogical contexts, and difficulty levels.

Consultations

The practical design of the learning circle curriculum also provided an opportunity for instructors to lead with the same best practices we were teaching: scaffolding new concepts and providing space for questions, concerns, and additional discussion during one-on-one consultations (Bussell & Larson, 2023). Further, the impetus for offering consultations was based both on the personal experience of the open educational practices specialist (OEP specialist) as a trained librarian and the natural inclination that some participants want additional time to discuss each session's content and/or the final project.

The consultations were conducted via Zoom and ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in length. There were four consultations total, and two required follow-ups via email to provide additional resources. The topics of the consultations followed four distinct themes: additional discussion on traditional versus renewable assignments, ensuring students understand their rights as creators, confirmation of an acceptable final project, and learning tools to achieve the final project outcomes. In the consultations regarding traditional versus renewable assignments and student creator rights, the OEP specialist discussed the topics in depth and worked with each participant to identify resources that may further explain these individual curricular concepts. In the consultations regarding the final project and learning tools, the OEP specialist worked with each participant to identify the learning outcomes for their final project (i.e., the renewable assignment or digital learning object) and to ensure that a tool would help each participant achieve said learning outcomes.

The overall feedback on the consultations was exceedingly positive, and those who did have a consultation and responded to the evaluation reporting mentioned that it provided them with the opportunity to receive guidance on their projects and how to accomplish them. Additional feedback advised that offering consultations in more than one modality would have given them different meeting options and more flexibility. For instance, the OEP specialist could offer 30-minute Zoom sessions as well as asynchronous opportunities to consult via email or chat. In future iterations, the consultation process will be guided by participants' needs and left open in terms of format and length of time required to meet.

Assessment

In addition to the weekly Mentimeter assessments to collect feedback about what participants learned from each session, we also built out a survey for participants to complete at the end of the learning circle. The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of 27 questions including:

- Background information questions
- Learning circle session questions
- Final project questions
- Tools used questions
- Learning circle consultations questions
- Overall experience questions

In the pilot session survey, six respondents out of the 10 participants turned in a learning circle project for their certificate of completion. Likewise, all the following cohorts' participants were also assessed weekly via Mentimeter, and a final evaluation survey was given at the end of the seven-week program. The survey consisted of the same questions with minor edits to include a new tool that was added due to a discontinuation of a previous tool. There were three things of note from the surveys that will help us shape future iterations of the learning circle. Items of note were responses to the prompts:

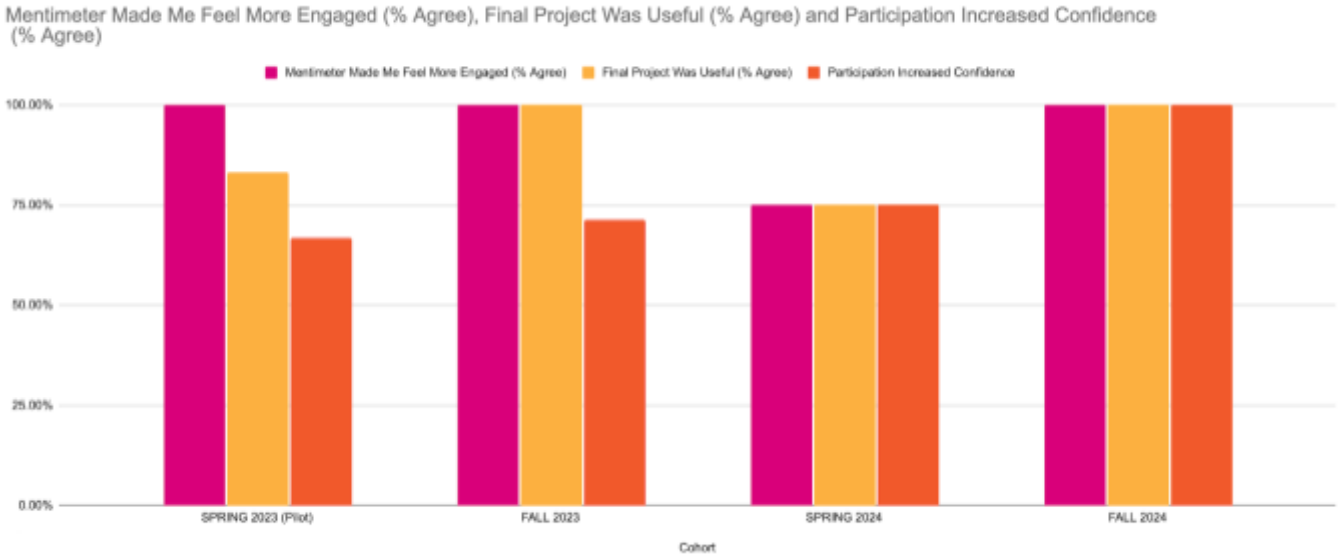
- The use of Menti allowed me to feel more engaged in the learning circle experience.
- I felt that creating the final project was (a) a good way for me to apply what I had learned in the learning circle or (b) busy work.
- I feel as if completing the Learning Circle on Open Pedagogy will help me improve my teaching or help me more confidently assist instructors in improving their teaching through the power of open pedagogy.

We wanted to know if participants liked using the Mentimeter format and if it helped them feel engaged in a virtual community building experience. We also wanted to know if participants felt the final project was useful so we could tweak it if it was not. Finally, we wanted to know if the work we did together in the learning circle was effective and if participants were more confident in their knowledge

of open pedagogy. Below are the aggregated results from the pilot session, as well as the following cohorts. Each of these questions are discussed and represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Learning Circle Results for Spring 2023 (Pilot), Fall 2023, Spring 2024, Fall 2024



Note. Question 1: Mentimeter made me feel more engaged (% Agree) shows 100% of participants agreed, except for spring 2024 where 75% agreed. Question 2: Final project was useful (% Agree) shows Spring 2023 Pilot 83.3% of the participants agreed and 75% of the participants agreed in spring 2024. 100% of participants agreed for fall 2023 and fall 2024. Question 3: Participation increased confidence (% Agree) shows 66.70% strongly agreed in Spring 2023 Pilot, 71.40% strongly agreed in fall 2023, 75% strongly agreed in spring 2024, and 100% strongly agreed in fall 2024.

Mentimeter Assessment

First, we wanted to know if participants enjoyed using Mentimeter throughout the sessions and if it made them feel more engaged with their peers so we could decide whether to continue using it in future offerings. In the pilot session in spring 2023, 100% of the survey respondents indicated that Mentimeter increased their engagement. Additionally, over the course of three new cohorts, 94.1% of the survey respondents indicated that Mentimeter increased their engagement. There were zero “no” responses, and one response indicated “yes” but the participant added an additional comment to note that it was “frustrating that the links in the slides on Menti are not clickable.” Unfortunately, this is a feature that cannot be changed as of yet in Mentimeter but is remedied by having clickable links in the accompanying Google slide decks. One participant in the third cohort (spring 2024) also indicated that Mentimeter did not allow them to feel more engaged during the experience, but they did not provide any additional context. Overall, this would indicate that the majority of participants felt Mentimeter allowed them to feel more engaged.

Usefulness of Project Assessment

Second, we asked a question about the usefulness of the final project. The intention of the learning circle was that participants leave with a completed learning object or renewable assignment that they could immediately implement into their existing work. In the pilot, 83.3% of survey respondents felt it was a good way to apply what they had learned, and 16.7% indicated that it was busy work—or to put it another way, one out of six respondents felt it was busy work. In the follow-up cohorts, an average of 88.2% of participants felt it was a "good way for them to apply what they had learned during the learning circle." As stated previously, one of the goals of the learning circle was to have participants authentically practice the principles of open pedagogy. This goal did not change from the pilot group to the follow-up cohorts, so this statistic is particularly encouraging.

Confidence Assessment

Lastly, the overarching goal of the learning circle was to ensure that participants felt more confident in either teaching with open pedagogy or assisting their colleagues in learning about open pedagogy. Survey respondents all agreed that the learning circle achieved this goal; 66.7% indicated they strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed. As with the pilot group of participants, the subsequent three cohorts agreed that they gained new levels of confidence regarding open pedagogy, with an average of 82.4% the strongly agreed, 17.6% agreed, and zero responses that disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Discussion

Pilot Overview and Results

The pilot version of the learning circle was both very ambitious and meta for what the OEN fellow hoped to accomplish. The goal was to provide an open pedagogy learning circle that engaged participants in open pedagogy themselves while learning about open pedagogy. This way they would understand their students' experience or be able to provide professional development for interested instructors from a place of expertise. In the first round, the learning circle had eight to ten consistent participants with an even split between faculty and instructional partner roles. As we built the community over the seven week learning circle experience, that dichotomy proved to be magic in the making! Participants shared insights from their perspectives that often created "ah-ha" moments for the participants in opposite roles.

For example, one insight that resonated with a lot of participants was changing the way we think about renewable assignments. Lauren Woolsey, a pilot participant, commented in the chat, "It might be easier to think of 'traditional/renewable' as ends of a smooth spectrum rather than two distinct categories" (L. Woolsey, personal communication, 2023). There was also some iteration that happened on the fly as we worked through the curriculum together. For example, when there was low participation in the Hypothes.is, a social annotation tool and the prework for its highlighted week, the OEN fellow realized that there needed to be more in-depth instructions on how to participate in the shared

annotation. That also led to participants having a great conversation about how their students encounter technology in the classroom, and it built a lot of empathy for their experiences when asked to try new things. In addition to the survey at the end of the learning circle and our weekly opening and closing activities, the facilitators also kept internal reflection notes after each session so we would not forget what worked and what did not work in the moment.

In the pilot round, 10 out of the 18 initial participants turned in a learning circle project to receive their certificate of completion in the learning circle, and seven of those 10, or 70% of submitters, chose to openly license their projects. Additionally, five of those seven, or 71% were instructor partner participants. Participants who chose to openly license their work also had the option to share their learning circle project in the Open Pedagogy Portal in either the discipline or the teaching and learning category.

The Open Pedagogy Portal is a repository created by the OEN to feature renewable assignments, student work product, and teaching and learning resources related to and in support of open pedagogy. The goal of the Open Pedagogy Portal was to create a place where faculty, faculty partners, and others in the open education community could find write-ups and case studies of renewable assignments from specific disciplines and courses, student work products, and teaching and learning resources such as infographics, professional development materials, and training materials that support open pedagogy. The Open Pedagogy Portal builds on the formative work of open advocates Robin DeRosa and Rajiv Jhangiani and the Open Pedagogy Notebook. The development of the portal coincided with the pilot round of the learning circle, which allowed us to begin the curation of this directory of open pedagogy resources.

Overview and Results of Follow-Up Cohorts

The second iteration of the learning circle remained in-line with the pilot in terms of content presented and flow of information. As the new facilitator and presenter for the learning circle, the OEP specialist wanted to ensure that they first had the information presented in each session well in hand before making any specific changes to the overall content or organization of the materials and resources. Additionally, with only minimal feedback from the pilot round, it seemed premature to make any major changes to the learning circle format and resources. However, structural updates were made to cull hyperlinks or resources that were no longer available or accessible to ensure all information in the learning circle materials were up to date.

In between the third and fourth cohorts (spring 2024 and fall 2024), more extensive changes were made to both the content and the supporting materials. For instance, in the first session titled “What is Open Pedagogy?” nine different definitions for open pedagogy and open educational practices were reviewed and discussed. The set of definitions was narrowed down to six and adjusted in order to not overwhelm participants and hone in on open pedagogy versus open educational practices as the foundational aspect for this learning circle experience. Additionally, in the third session titled “Consent in the Classroom, Brave Spaces, and Care in the Open,” the section on brave spaces has been expanded to include further clarification and illumination. Other adjustments have been made to keep in line with

updates from source documentation such as the updated guidelines for Universal Design for Learning created by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) in July 2024. Furthermore, to support users who want to facilitate their own learning circle at their individual institutions or organizations, all slide decks have been updated with speaker notes to guide facilitators.

For the second (fall 2023) round, eleven out of twelve participants submitted final projects to receive their certificate of completion in the learning circle. In the third (spring 2024) and fourth (fall 2024) rounds, seven out of 12 participants submitted final projects and 10 out of 12 participants submitted final projects, respectively. Projects submitted by faculty participants varied widely in the ways in which they incorporated open pedagogy into previous assignments to create renewable assignments. For example, faculty updated the format types accepted by students for final projects, offered the opportunity for openly licensing student submissions, replaced essays with the creation of ancillary material assignments, and intentionally incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion, and social justice principles. Throughout the learning circle, faculty are encouraged to start small when redesigning their assignments, so this range of renewable assignments is reflective of this key principle of working in the *open*. Projects submitted by faculty partner participants tended to be infographics that could be used in their own institutional contexts to educate faculty and colleagues on open pedagogy, open licensing, and diversity, equity, and inclusion, and social justice principles.

In keeping with principles of consent within open pedagogy, participants had the option to license their work openly or with traditional copyright. In the second round of the learning circle, 72.7 percent of participants chose to license their work with an open license. Interestingly, faculty partner participants were more likely to openly license their work—80% of faculty partner participants chose to openly license their work compared to 50% of faculty participants. Likewise, in the third and fourth rounds, an average of 41% of submissions were openly licensed, and out of those participants almost half were faculty partners.

Overall, based on feedback from the participants and the facilitator's sense of the process, we found that both the individual sessions and the complete learning circle scope worked extremely well. The slide decks and other materials and resources for each session provided the scaffolding necessary to create an environment in which everyone started on even footing. The interactivity of Mentimeter was received well by all, and it allowed for participants to both get to know each other and have real time interactions that led to meaningful discussions. Feedback also showed that sixty-minute sessions were the exact right amount of time for participants. However, some participants did offer the suggestion to build in additional time for discussion of their projects instead of waiting until the final show and tell session, which would likely mean increasing each session length or extending the total number of sessions.

Limitations and Recommendations

It is worth noting that we faced some limitations in the planning and facilitation of the learning circles. As facilitators, we talked frequently in our planning, session reflection notes, and debriefs about

participation. It is important to understand the context of your institution to plan appropriately for participant attrition. For example, the Open Pedagogy Learning Circle experienced a difference in how many participants were accepted versus how many actually showed up throughout the sessions. It is ideal to have between 10-12 people attend each session in order for the discussion to feel vibrant and engaged. If you do not plan accordingly for participant attrition, you may not have enough participants to make your Open Pedagogy Learning Circle a success.

Another limitation that we encountered is that there is not a lot of research on this kind of learning circle within the open education community or outside of it; this is why our preliminary research to inform our planning process was so broad and interdisciplinary. As such, it is worth considering if you want to collect program data or not as you plan your learning circle. If you do collect data, you can add to the scholarly conversation by sharing your experience facilitating a learning circle. This is particularly important if you want to scope your survey in a way that would require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval or exemption, as that can take time and many iterations to secure for human subjects research. Some future research areas we identified are:

- Overall learning circle program results (similar to what was shared in the assessment section)
- Case studies or innovative practice articles that highlight the use of the transformed assignment or learning object created by learning circle participants
- Longitudinal efficacy studies on institutional impact for facilitating a learning circle

One surprising limitation we found in the pilot offering of the learning circle was that we did not anticipate the desire for participants to want a certificate of completion for participating. We then made the decision to offer one on the fly, which was an easy enough addition to the conclusion of participation. The certificate was designed using Canva and distributed after a review of the final projects. In the following cohorts, we announced in the first session during the overview that certificates of completion would be awarded to participants who attended all seven sessions and who completed and submitted learning circle projects. While attendance is a requirement to receive the certificate, we are conscious that unexpected interferences may occur, and we typically still award the certificate if the final project was submitted and a majority of sessions are attended. We recommend considering whether you will offer a certificate or microcredential before offering the learning circle so that you can include that into your call for participants.

A personal limitation that we identified is that as the creators of the OEN's Open Pedagogy Learning Circle model, it is hard for us to estimate the time it would take for a new facilitator to pick up these materials and implement them at their own institution. We recommend looking through all the provided curricular materials for the learning circle and identifying gaps you would need to fill for your implementation. What will or will not work at your institution? What might need to be modified? For example, if you are in a state where DEI can no longer be part of professional development (the OEN fellow is), you could winnow down the session on those topics and increase the amount of accessibility content you share. How much preparation time do you need to be ready to facilitate an hour-long session? How much individual capacity do you have to take on a new professional development offering? Have you calculated the time for recruitment and program assessment? Once you have

answered these questions for yourself, we recommend scaffolding the prep work to help prevent professional burnout. Just as we tell our learning circle participants, there is nothing wrong with starting small and scaling up from there.

As stated throughout, the learning circle materials are designed so that any facilitator could take what we crafted and run a learning circle at their institution. These materials are designed to teach participants about open pedagogy, and facilitators could drop other topics into the framework provided. We see the potential for the curriculum to be leveraged in larger and potentially incentivized contexts at other institutions. For example, the OEN fellow plans to use the curriculum to build an open pedagogy teaching endorsement through the Michael V. Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University. Additionally, some OEN members have already adapted the curriculum in ways that meet their own needs and context. For instance, the Private Academic Library Network of Indiana (PALNI) has adapted the curriculum to create a handbook that goes along with their cohort's synchronous discussions about open pedagogy via Slack (Witman et al., 2025). Moreover, the OEP specialist's future plans include not only updating and maintaining the content for the learning circle but also investigating ways in which the OEN could offer the learning circle on a larger scale through community facilitators to further customize and contextualize the learning circle content based on specific community members' needs.

Overall, the process of iterating on the learning circle is ongoing, and after each cohort, evaluations and feedback will continue to be analyzed to ensure that the learning circle is meeting the needs of its participants and potential facilitators.

Conclusion

"I'm afraid I'm doing it wrong." This was a comment shared by one of the participants during the second offering of the Open Pedagogy Learning Circle after the session on diversity, equity and inclusion and social justice. Several participants agreed that they felt the same way. The fear of "doing it wrong" adds to barriers faced by faculty and librarians who desire to engage in open pedagogy to improve classroom instruction and make it more inclusive and student-centered; among them, the fact that there is no agreed-upon definition of open pedagogy in the field, librarians who have the professional capacity to help faculty struggling to implement open pedagogical practices can be rare, and the implicit worry that our own biases and misassumptions could subvert the many benefits of open pedagogy. These concerns might be completely appropriate. Croft and Brown (2020) suggest that without critically examining open educational practices, we might negatively impact marginalized students as we attempt to implement such practices. But fear does not alleviate our responsibility to act. We should be even more concerned about open pedagogy and how students are feeling as we implement it, as Hofer et al. (2021) point out through the use of their helpful Open Pedagogy & Student Discomfort chart, presented at the 2021 OEN Summit.

All of these concerns point to an even bigger one. Without appropriate support and resources, faculty will not attempt open pedagogy at all or even know they might already be using it in their classrooms. As a result, the OEN has rolled out multiple supports, trainings, and resources around open

pedagogy: the short-term Open Pedagogy Learning Circle, facilitated by the OEN once a semester; the year-long Certificate in Open Educational Practices for faculty and librarian teams; two new workshops for faculty, librarians, and others supporting faculty around open pedagogy and how to get started; the Open Pedagogy Portal for case studies, student work product, and associated resources for open pedagogy; the Open Pedagogy Student Toolkit to help students and the faculty supporting them engage in open pedagogy; and the Open Pedagogy Community of Practice that meets monthly for practitioners who want a safe space to connect and share. All of the curriculum and resources created are openly licensed, and our goal is to put these and the training accompanying the curriculum into the hands of higher education professionals to offer it on their own campuses. So we embrace fear as a way of ensuring that we are moving forward carefully and thoughtfully in ways that center the student experience and help us think critically about our use of open pedagogical practices.

We hope that the community will find these resources useful. Please see Appendices A and B for our survey materials (questions and anonymized results) and curricular resources and examples.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all cohorts of the learning circles. Your participation and feedback have been greatly appreciated.

Conflict of Interest Statement

Amanda Larson is the Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education*. She recused herself of any editorial work related to this article, and Jamie Witman handled the submission and author communications for this piece. Managing Editor Chelsee Dickson handled the article through the editorial process.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Survey Questions

We have provided the survey questions used in the OEN's Learning Circle on Open Pedagogy Evaluation:

- Learning Circle on Open Pedagogy Evaluation Questions

Results

We have provided the anonymized survey results for each cohort below:

- Survey Results Spring 2023 (Pilot)
- Survey Results Fall 2023
- Survey Results Spring 2024
- Survey Results Fall 2024

Appendix B. Curricular Resources and Examples

Here is a list of the curricular resources and examples that we think will be helpful to facilitate the learning circles at other institutions and organizations.

- Canvas Course: Learning Circle on Open Pedagogy
- Google Folder: Learning Circle on Open Pedagogy Curriculum
- Open Pedagogy Portal
- The Open Education Network Open Pedagogy Resources
- Open Pedagogy Notebook
- Open Pedagogy Approaches
- Open Pedagogy Incubator at NC State University
- Teaching with Open Pedagogy from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Volume **03** (2025) Issue 3 https://doi.org/10.31274/joerhe.20091
Peer Review

Open Peer Review

Essmiller, K. (2025, May). [Open Pedagogy in Practice: Designing Learning Circles for Professional Development, by T. Grosz, A. C. Larson, & J. Witman]. *Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education, 3*(3), 222-240. doi: 10.31274/joerhe.20091

Reviewer: Kathy Essmiller

Recommendation: Accept without Revisions

Scope, Objectives, Content

Is the article in scope for Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education? Does the topic discuss an element related to open education, open data, open access, or other open topics? Is the topic an important one, or is it trivial or of low priority?

In scope, discusses related elements, very important/high priority.

Organization

Does the article proceed logically? As applicable, does the article adhere to a recommended structure and the section guideline?

The article does proceed logically, and the structure and sections are very readable. I included some comments about voice and shifting tense in the last section of this review. Minor, easy copy edits.

Methodology, Approach, Conclusions

The methodology for data gathering and analysis should be appropriate for the problem addressed. Inferences from data should be sound--the author should not reach unsupported conclusions. Not all papers will use a scientific research methodology, but all should employ sound reasoning and an adequate balance between description and critical analysis. Consider: Is the article factually accurate? Is it clear the author knows, or has investigated, previous work on the subject of the article? Has the author failed to reference recent or seminal work on the subject?

This paper does a great job of describing all elements of the Open Pedagogy Learning Circles. Covers the why and how of their development, does a great job of talking the reader through the pilot and follow-up implementations, and includes strong next steps in the conclusion.

The section describing the impact of Mentimeter on participant engagement might be a distraction. The data isn't really robust enough to support this as a 'case for using Mentimeter', and the rest of the article is rich enough that removing the section on Mentimeter might actually increase the readers' ability to benefit from the description of the learning circle implementation. [wait, I read the piece again-again and added more notes to this review section, don't delete anything yet].

Leaving the Mentimeter stuff in doesn't make it a deal breaker though, great piece either way. I'd leave that up to the authors.

Note after third full read through: ok this time I read it through faster, and see that it is central to your discussion of how you assessed and evaluated the work for iterative development. First time, slow, detailed read through, it seemed like a detour 'about Mentimeter', I think the regular reader on the street won't find it a distraction. If you leave it in, though, you might take a couple of sentences and explain what Mentimeter is. I can see this very strong piece being read by people outside of librarianship/open, in other learning design spaces that might not see a Mentimeter as much as we do.

And yes, a humble brag, I read the article three times as I reviewed it. :-)

Writing Style, References

Please indicate whether there are problems with expression or flow, but do not comment about grammar or basic edits. Do NOT take the time to do copy editing - that will be handled later in the process. However, general comments pointing out problems with style or format are useful.

This is a strong case study which includes rich detail that can help the reader make sense of the context of the case under discussion and transfer it to their own environment. Well written piece describing a fantastic, meaningful, impactful project.

I would suggest removing the first sentence in paragraph 2 of the conclusion. The sentence claims that "without appropriate support and resources, faculty won't attempt open pedagogy at all". I think making this claim discounts the fact that many faculty do enact effective pedagogy that fits our understanding of 'open pedagogy', they just don't know it as open pedagogy. They are enacting the practice under the auspices of, well, meaningful and effective pedagogy. Beginning the paragraph with the second sentence, "The Open Education Network has rolled out . . ." would capture the meaning of the paragraph without leaving readers wrestling with their understandings related to the claim made in sentence one.

I would toss in Catherine Cronin's 2017 piece on Open Pedagogy somewhere when you are discussing definitions. No need to rewrite, I think it would be an appropriate in-text citation after sentence 2 in the paragraph before "Why Learning Circles". (. . .focus on student agency as scholars . . . .own right). It would also fit in that paragraph since you are citing Lambert and Katz & Allen. The Cronin piece is a good balance to the Wiley 2017 piece, I think they are both important to our understanding of open pedagogy. But I also toss in Cronin references wherever I can, because I love her work, so definitely authors' choice on this. Strong piece even without the Cronin reference.

Cronin, C. (2017). Openness and praxis: Exploring the use of open educational practices in higher education. International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 18(5), 15-34.

Application:

Does the article contribute knowledge or practical examples that will inform/improve others' practice or education?

Absolutely!!!!!

What are the stronger points/qualities of the article?

Well-written case study that includes rich details that will help readers envision enactment of similar projects in their own context. Includes access to the materials in a variety of formats and locations that can optimize readers' use of the curriculum. Yay!!!

What are the weaker points/qualities of the article? How could they be strengthened?

These aren't weaknesses, just copy-edit stuff that probably slipped by tired eyes doing the proof reading. The piece is great. Some minor observations:

The "Discussion" shifts to referring to Amanda by name, I think in the sections before she had been referred to as the "OEP Specialist". The tone of the "Discussion" also centers the goals of the pilot as "Amanda's goals"; in prior sections it seemed more objective. Unifying this one way or the other throughout the piece will be helpful.

"Overview and Results of Follow-Up Cohorts" voice moves to first person, "I wanted to ensure", that will get sorted as you go through and unify the voice/perspective.

Inconsistent use of hyphen in the word/phrase "follow up" throughout. I have no idea which way it should actually be, but probably pick one.

Third paragraph before "Conclusion", inconsistent tense. Which I guess is better than consistently tense, ha!! Seems like a copy paste thing, one sentence maybe got added from another section without shifting the tense to match the current paragraph.

Inconsistent capitalization of Learning Circle, particularly in the conclusion. I think you capitalize Learning Circle most of the article, then it shows up lower case a couple of times in the conclusion. Maybe that was intentional, if so, wahoo!

Overall a quick run-through/copy-edit for grammar, the occasional (maybe just one) it's instead of its, etc.

Peer Review Ranking: Scope

Does the topic discuss an element related to open education, open data, open access, or other open topics?

Highly relevant

Peer Review Ranking: Clarity

Clarity of expression and flow? Does the article proceed logically?

Very clear

Peer Review Ranking: Contribution

Contribution to Higher Education research and/or practice

Highly contributes

Peer Review Ranking: Research Methodology

If this is a research paper, is the methodology appropriate?

Highly appropriate

Peer Review Ranking: Conclusion

If this is a research paper, is the methodology appropriate? Does the article contribute knowledge or practical examples that will inform/improve others' practice or education?

Highly sound

Overall Evaluation

Accept Without Revisions

Volume **03** (2025) Issue 3 https://doi.org/10.31274/joerhe.20091
Peer Review

Open Peer Review

McGeary, B. (2025, July). [Open Pedagogy in Practice: Designing Learning Circles for Professional Development, by T. Grosz, A. C. Larson, & J. Witman]. *Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education, 3*(3), 222-240. doi: 10.31274/joerhe.20091

Reviewer: Bryan McGeary

Recommendation: Minor Revisions

Scope, Objectives, Content

Is the article in scope for Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education? Does the topic discuss an element related to open education, open data, open access, or other open topics? Is the topic an important one, or is it trivial or of low priority?

This article is well within the scope of the Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education, as it focuses on a program designed to provide professional development opportunities to faculty centered around open pedagogy.

Organization

Does the article proceed logically? As applicable, does the article adhere to a recommended structure and the section guideline?

The article proceeds logically and adheres to the recommended structure and section guidelines.

Methodology, Approach, Conclusions

The methodology for data gathering and analysis should be appropriate for the problem addressed. Inferences from data should be sound--the author should not reach unsupported conclusions. Not all papers will use a scientific research methodology, but all should employ sound reasoning and an adequate balance between description and critical analysis. Consider: Is the article factually accurate? Is it clear the author knows, or has investigated, previous work on the subject of the article? Has the author failed to reference recent or seminal work on the subject?

The authors' methodology, approach, and conclusions are sound and factually accurate. The authors' literature review and references demonstrate that they are well-versed in their topic.

They're working with a relatively small population for the surveys, but they don't appear to be suggesting that their findings are more broadly generalizable. The general consistency of responses between cohorts also bolsters their conclusions. For the participant surveys, I was curious to know if the authors had gathered information about which of the two participant categories (faculty or faculty partners) the responses came from. I think that could potentially be useful context when considering the participant feedback. For example, they noted that some of the participants felt that creating the final project was busy work. The implications of that and how to improve in response to that feedback could be different if those individuals were from one group versus the other.

While the authors were very clear in their survey results section to indicate the total number of respondents for each of the cohorts, it appears (unless I missed something) that they don't indicate the total number of participants in each of the follow-up cohorts until later in the discussion section. I think it would be useful to have that information earlier.

Writing Style, References

Please indicate whether there are problems with expression or flow, but do not comment about grammar or basic edits. Do NOT take the time to do copy editing - that will be handled later in the process. However, general comments pointing out problems with style or format are useful.

The writing style is very clear and cohesive. It's clear that the authors are well-versed in the subject matter, not just for the purposes of producing this article, but for creating this program in the first place. The article generally has a singular voice, despite being the work of three authors, which is excellent; however, there is a spot at the beginning of the Overview and Results of Follow-Up Cohorts section where they use the pronoun "I", which seems strange on an article with three authors.

In terms of references, there were a few places where it was unclear to me why the authors chose to hyperlink to a source rather than providing a reference. For example, several sources in the Why Learning Circles? section are linked to directly, but they are not present in the list of references at the end of the article. That's perhaps a question for the copyediting phase since it seems to be more of a stylistic choice.

Application:

Does the article contribute knowledge or practical examples that will inform/improve others' practice or education?

Yes, this article is very practical in terms of providing readers with the background and resources needed to replicate a version of this program at their own institutions. As the authors indicated, there is a great need for more professional development around open pedagogy, and this article (and the program it details) addresses that need.

What are the stronger points/qualities of the article?

The article provides a very comprehensive picture of this program and its goals and outcomes. The reader gets a good sense of the program's impetus and development, the specifics of its implementation

(including links to the program resources), and its results. Someone potentially interested in implementing some version of this at their own institution could read this article and come away from it with a sense of how to implement it and what to expect if they choose to do so.

What are the weaker points/qualities of the article? How could they be strengthened?

This isn't necessarily a weak point, but there were a few spots where some additional information could have provided me with more clarity. For example, I would have liked to have seen more information about the recruitment/application process. In the Overview of Open Pedagogy Learning Circles, it mentions that they "admitted a group of 18 instructional faculty and faculty partners (instructional designers, librarians, administrators, etc.)," but it wasn't clear to me what steps they took (if any) to ensure that the group had adequate representation from these two categories of participants.

I also wonder if the Learning Circle Projects section might benefit from the addition of a diagram of the project timelines. The descriptions are clear, but also seeing a side-by-side, week-by-week breakdown of the two projects might make that information a little easier to digest and to see any potential connections between what the two categories of participants are doing at any given stage. It's definitely not a must-have, just something to consider.

The section on using digital learning tools makes it very clear that the authors were cognizant of the need to provide participants with plenty of information to choose tools that were appropriate for their contexts and the training necessary to use these tools competently. However, I wondered if they had considered/discussed the issue of institutional approval of such tools. We've run into this issue at my institution on numerous occasions where there are great tools to facilitate open educational practices (including some of the ones that are frequently referenced in the open education community), but they haven't received institutional approval for use for one reason or another (e.g., security requirements, LTI [compatibility], accessibility, etc.). And even in scenarios where they do receive approval, this process often takes months, and faculty (and even faculty partners, in many cases) generally aren't prepared for navigating it. It can be frustrating for faculty and faculty partners to learn about all of these possibilities, only to have them thwarted by institutional [bureaucracy]. It made me wonder if this is something that was discussed in the Learning Circles program.

Peer Review Ranking: Scope

Does the topic discuss an element related to open education, open data, open access, or other open topics?

Highly relevant

Peer Review Ranking: Clarity

Clarity of expression and flow? Does the article proceed logically?

Very clear

Peer Review Ranking: Contribution

Contribution to Higher Education research and/or practice

Highly contributes

Peer Review Ranking: Methodology

If this is a research paper, is the methodology appropriate?

Highly appropriate

Peer Review Ranking: Conclusion

If this is a research paper, is the methodology appropriate? Does the article contribute knowledge or practical examples that will inform/improve others' practice or education?

Highly sound

Overall Evaluation

Minor Revisions Required
