

BREAKING OPEN: DEFINING A STUDENT-CENTERED PEDAGOGY

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As librarians, we are concerned with access, but our core mission is to serve the institution. In order to truly “break open” from unethical labor practices, systemic racism in higher education, and uninformed pedagogical training, we found the ACRL Framework a key tool in elevating our mission. Breaking Open: An Open Pedagogy Symposium was created as a response to the need for a critical focus on pedagogy, an integration of student and faculty content production, and racial inequities at the City University of New York (CUNY). By directing campus-specific OER grant funding to doctoral and master’s students of color who teach as adjuncts and involving these student-faculty in an interactive, collectively-shared Symposium, we sought to collectively delve into the complex and the fertile intersections of labor, race, and access in higher education.

Three events revealed the deepening intersections of educational access, labor, and inclusive representation in New York City. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio urged the abolishment of specialized high school testing in 2018 after only seven black students were awarded access to the elite Stuyvesant High School, less than 1 percent of the entering 895 student class.¹ That same year, teaching adjuncts across CUNY rallied to strike for a salary increase, hoping to achieve \$7,000 per course and bring CUNY into closer proximity to the compensation rates of nearby institutions.² Finally, CUNY was awarded a third year of \$4

million in state funding toward the development of open educational resources (OER), a direct response to rising textbook prices and student financial need.³

As the primary doctoral-granting institution of CUNY, doctoral students of the Graduate Center at CUNY (GC) teach as adjuncts in large numbers—upward of 7,600 courses per year, reaching as many as 150,000 CUNY undergraduates. At CUNY, many adjunct educators understand that supplying an equitable education also means addressing racial and economic inequity, whether on a global scale or in recognition of local labor struggles. With state grant funding, GC librarians created an Open Pedagogy Fellowship, composed of a four-day bootcamp and day-long symposium, *Breaking Open: an Open Pedagogy Symposium*, both of which have been reprised for the second consecutive year in spring 2020. In each iteration, fellows were introduced to open resources and strategies for innovative pedagogy, challenged to implement “open” in their field of study, supported by librarians and educational technologists on the creation of course sites, and charged to migrate their syllabi to OER. This chapter discusses the development and implementation of the Open Pedagogy Fellowship over two years and how alongside issues of access and equity, the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* was applied.

On May 16, 2018, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced that \$8 million was allocated for the Open Educational Resources Initiative.⁴ In the following two years, each CUNY campus received funding to develop its own program, which ranged from faculty stipends to create original OER content (textbooks, manuals, etc.) to fellowship programs granting a stipend of \$1,500–\$2,500, and for ongoing training in how to find and implement open resources. Typically, these funds were directed toward faculty, with the goal of lowering the per-course materials cost for undergraduate students. In its Year One Report, the Office of Library Services estimated that \$9.5 million had been saved, based on class enrollment and the number of courses converted to zero textbook cost (ZTC).⁵

The Graduate Center occupies a uniquely high-profile position for its relatively small student population of roughly 4,700 students primarily in master’s and doctoral programs. During the first year of the grant, funding was applied to a fellowship, which introduced the CUNY Academic Commons to a group of seven faculty members, with support from the library. For the second year, the library applied independently for OER grant funding with the aim of creating an opportunity that was primarily student-focused, directed to the doctoral student population that would teach at undergraduate campuses. The resulting Open Pedagogy Fellowship was composed of an intensive four-day OER bootcamp in January 2019 and the end-of-year *Breaking Open Symposium* in May 2019. The creation of the fellowship meant that the grant was directly allocated to doctoral students who were teaching as adjuncts across all disciplines. The timing was designed to accommodate student schedules, with primary

training components held during winter break. Of forty-eight applicants, thirteen students were selected as fellows in the program; the following year, the applicant pool increased to sixty-seven for the same number of spots.

THE OPEN PEDAGOGY FELLOWSHIP

During bootcamp instruction, fellows were asked to investigate the structural and political implications of open versus closed while simultaneously combining the positionality of the instructor and the student in both the classroom and the development of the course. The ACRL dispositions of Authority Is Constructed and Contextual and Information Has Value were utilized as a framework that guided the construction of the four days. Additionally, Searching as Strategic Exploration, Scholarship as Conversation, and Information Creation as a Process were frames used in consideration of the search for open educational resources in a compounded four-day period. Finally, the application of critical pedagogies included postcolonial narratives, country of origin, and racial identities as components for investigation, pushing fellows closer to the complex questions of Research as Inquiry, which often led us back to the construction and context of authority and, more holistically, the iterative nature of the ACRL Framework.⁶

The Open Pedagogy Fellowship, and particularly the symposium, took direct inspiration from the work of Toronto-based scholar Clelia Rodríguez, author of *Decolonizing Academia: Poverty, Oppression, and Pain*.⁷ Rodríguez's work served as an essential tool, a blueprint for navigating the disparate points of entry through which we were able to pedagogically consider ancestral ties and cross-geographic boundaries. Immediately after reading *Decolonizing Academia: Poverty, Oppression, and Pain*, we invited Rodríguez to deliver the keynote address to the symposium, designed as a closed conference for mostly students of color who were CUNY doctoral, master's and MLIS students. The Open Pedagogy Fellowship was designed as a response to race/diversity in the New York City educational system, inclusivity as it pertains to scholarship, and a way to explore the connections between decolonization and pedagogy. We argue that open education is meaningful when placed into its surrounding context, thoroughly grounded by considerations of labor, compensation, race, and other resultant hegemonies.

The Breaking Open Symposium took place on a single day in May 2019 and was followed by Towards an Open Future in April 2020 (hosted entirely online). Both of these events, in different ways, acknowledged critical issues at the heart of the doctoral student experience and their crucial role as adjuncts. By combining these lived realities with an ethos of "open," building upon the ACRL frame Authority Is Constructed and Contextual, we invited adjunct faculty to consider themselves in a central role.

The definition and practice of creating OER relate strongly to the frame “Information Creation as a Process,” remixing and transposing new content for student audiences. Following the line of information creation, we might also question the origin of knowledge itself: who is in the position of authority, and whose words become institutionalized?

Broadening our lens, we started to ask what it would mean to view CUNY, the nation’s second-largest university system, through a lens of structural transparency. If we ask not only *what* is taught, but *by whom*, we will quickly see a pattern emerge: that the majority of courses are taught by underpaid contingent faculty (some of whom resist the term “professor,” since it hides their adjunct status); that there is an increasing majority of students of color; and that the top tier of this system, the Graduate Center, holds a visible imbalance of white, male, full-time faculty.

How does this impact CUNY as a whole and how do we assess educational value in a system that enrolls a quarter of a million students per year? The labor issues surrounding adjuncts at CUNY stand as an unresolved question mark: at the writing of this article, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) is lobbying for an increase to \$7,000 per course.⁸ Yet the under-acknowledged contribution of teaching adjuncts is key: at some colleges, such as the College of Staten Island, adjunct labor comprises over 60 percent of the faculty. *Authority Is Constructed and Contextual* was applied not only within the course materials themselves but also in the lived experience of adjunct instructors at CUNY.

Similarly, the adjunct labor crisis and equitable educational resources, though superficially unrelated, are connected. Without critique, an overly positive framing of “open” serves to conceal labor dynamics as well as political and economic agendas within the academy. As referenced earlier, Dr. Rodríguez’s direct and spirited focus on decolonial praxis became a powerful tool, one that brought about meaningful conversations within academia. Her work was strongly aligned with the critiques of indigenous scholars, a much-needed counterbalance to the prevailing rhetoric. In the spirit of the ACRL frame *Research as Inquiry*, we found grounding and willingness to stay openly receptive, allowing for a process that was “iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions.”⁹ Dr. Rodríguez’s decolonial framing supplied an array of rich contexts connected to ancestral connection, indigeneity, and positionality that affected each participant at a core level, allowing for an inquiry-based approach to our teaching and learning.

To further enunciate the use of *Authority Is Constructed and Contextual*, we asked fellows to detail their experiences in edited reflections to be posted on the Graduate Center Library’s public-facing blog. Many cited the lessons learned from Dr. Rodríguez’s redirection of authority to ancestral connections. These reflection pieces then laid the groundwork for articulating the fellows’ agency

as contributors to the landscape of open as well as budding scholars. Open Pedagogy Fellow and doctoral student in Critical Social Personality Psychology, Allison Cabana, wrote in her reflection piece, *Open Pedagogy as Intentional Interruption*, that “Rodríguez challenged the audience to rethink pedagogy, and include students’ own history, [asking] ‘What would a curriculum with the known look like? Sounds, faces, first and last names, places where they’re from, where they belong, recipes?’”¹⁰ To foster educational spaces that truly draw from our histories and the details of everyday life is a radical move. Through questions such as these, Rodríguez interrogated the complicated legacies of colonialism—specifically, its relationship to the functional elitism of academia, and violent compartmentalization of knowledge.

THE GRADUATE CENTER LIBRARY LANDSCAPE

The Graduate Center received OER funds through the Office of Library Services (OLS), the main administrative library office of the university in 2018 and 2019. The nature of the funds meant that they must all be spent within the same fiscal cycle (September–June) that the grant was awarded. The process for which grant funds were distributed is significant because it highlights the short timeline involved: applications were considered by OLS, granted to campuses, and put to use for any requisitions, hiring, purchase orders, or other cost measures, most of which had to be processed very shortly thereafter due to end of year reporting. Some campuses funded faculty to create OER and receive support.

The Graduate Center Library planned a fellowship designed for fellows who applied with an interest in transforming their course into a designated zero-cost course in the registrar’s scheduling system. Funds were distributed in the middle of the fall semester, meaning that the programming had to be moved up to a start in mid-January to support spring courses. Despite the limited timeframe, the fellowship was funded with enough time to put a call out to doctoral students who would be teaching in the spring semester, request a copy of their syllabi, a description of their teaching philosophy as it would relate to open, and secure their availability for a winter OER bootcamp.

The OER grant funding contributed to an existing commitment of library advocacy toward the ethos of open at the Graduate Center. Access and pedagogy were critically intertwined, especially at the graduate level. Doctoral-level research requires a specificity not offered in the more generalized academic databases: the Graduate Center Library partners with The New York Public Library and other institutions in a variety of cross-institutional programs, but ultimately there are critical limitations on everyday access to scholarship. Among librarians and faculty, these questions are under constant discussion and fall within the additional context of CUNY-wide budgeting constraints.

Grant funding comes into play as a boost to existing efforts and as a way to expand notions of pedagogical practice. The idea that open resources will offer financial relief to students is a viable and relatable concern for any CUNY instructor. As identified within a Stanford University research study of income levels of college undergraduates, “almost half of CUNY’s students come from households earning less than \$20,000 of income; at the senior colleges nearly 40 percent came from such households, while at the community colleges, it was nearly 53 percent.”¹¹ In 2019, the CUNY University Student Senate endorsed OER, targeting the cost of course materials as “a major affordability issue for students” and identifying open textbooks as “an affordable, comparable and flexible alternative to expensive, commercial textbook.”¹²

However, there are limitations: full-time faculty are often wary of the time and labor involved, particularly in restructuring the syllabus to include open resources. For adjunct faculty, the required labor is exacerbated by their limited time on campus and lack of research leave or other institutional benefits. Inclusion in OER programming is therefore self-selective and not always fully representative of CUNY faculty as a whole. Additionally, as with most academic institutions, adjuncts are structurally not afforded the freedom to choose their own course materials and are put in the position of assigning commercialized textbooks, despite having firsthand experience of that financial burden. In this sense, teaching adjuncts (as opposed to non-teaching adjuncts, a category many library adjuncts fall under) are the perfect advocates for “open,” as they understand firsthand the difficulty of access and how it impacts student work.

The fellowship was designed to both support doctoral students in redesigning the syllabus and lower the materials costs for the undergraduate students enrolled in their courses. CUNY’s undergraduate student population, described by Vice-Chancellor Gloria Waters in 2010 as “remarkably diverse... white, black and Hispanic undergraduates each comprise more than a quarter of the student body, and Asians account for more than 15%.”¹³ The *Daily News* and other media outlets pointed out that “more than two-thirds” of CUNY faculty identified as white, in contrast to their ratio of the New York City population, which hovered at 40 percent.¹⁴ Only a year earlier, *The New York Times* reported on a demographic shift among CUNY undergraduates in which the enrollment of black freshmen dropped to 10 percent from 17 percent in the year 2000.¹⁵

These statistics revealed a gap between the university faculty and students, displaying a real need for the foregrounding of race and equity in future conversations. According to data collected by the Graduate Center Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness in 2013, the Graduate Center doctoral student body was 60 percent white and 40 percent students of color, with a total of 4,012 doctoral students.¹⁶ During the OER Symposium, conversations about “open” intersected with these underlying demographic realities.

THE GRADUATE CENTER OER BOOTCAMP

Scholarship as Conversation

The heart of the fellowship was the creation and implementation of course sites, modeled from pre-existing syllabi, for which openly accessible materials would be housed. The process for migrating one's syllabus from closed and print resources to openly available online materials required a detailed overview of each known course component—course readings, activities, and assignments—and overlaying a concept of “open.” This process first required a course in the basic tenets of open access and information literacy. Fellows were also expected to implement active learning strategies that encapsulated a student-centered approach, envisioning their students as a part of the scholarly conversation in the classroom. Though this process varied for each fellow due to variation in field and class size, each fellow held an acknowledgment of their positions as both undergraduate instructors and, simultaneously, doctoral students, “recognizing that scholarly conversations take place in various venues.”¹⁷ While seeking out conversations that took place in their research area, courses were simultaneously generating user-based content for a variety of publics.

As a function of taking responsibility for their positionalities and primary role in course design, each fellow was asked to report their experience by contributing a scholarly article, in first-person narrative, to the GC library blog. The blog, which had been in existence for over five years, had thousands of followers and yet was still only a blog.¹⁸ There was no peer-review process; each post was edited by a librarian and aimed to highlight the author by cross-posting to a blogspace designated for the fellowship. For fellows embarking on the PhD with no previous publications or online mentions, the blog post represented a contribution while helping to identify barriers to entering the scholarly conversation.

Based on blog posts and interest, select fellows presented their experiences providing OER at the culminating event, the Open Pedagogy Symposium. Others chose to rework and submit their blog posts as external conference paper submissions. ACRL-NY accepted a paper for a panel that discussed the Open Pedagogy Symposium and included librarians, doctoral students, and library students. This second tier of access to the scholarly landscape ensured that doctoral student fellows saw themselves as contributors to scholarship rather than only consumers of it. Fellows were urged to apply the same dispositions and knowledge practices received in the bootcamp and symposium into their own classrooms.

Information Has Value

The events that book-ended the fellowship had a clear focus on participants' dual role as students and instructors, posing the need for an expansive vision of “open” to include people as much as it did resources. Truly, the idea that people are the

ones that create the resources, that all information is generated through labor, and that information has value as a result of the labor surrounding its development, as well as the usefulness of its content, was a driving factor in the selection of course materials. Additionally, in the development of OER, fellows were urged to consider storage, hosting, access, and preservation. To add core concepts of information literacy by first detailing the information life cycle was how the Open Pedagogy Bootcamp began. The goal was to detail for students the problem statement of “closed” before engaging them with a conversation of “open.”

Bootcamp Schedule

The bootcamp opened with a presentation by Chief Librarian Polly Thistlethwaite, who spoke about her involvement with the activist group ACT-UP during the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1990s in New York City. She described the urgent need for publicly available scientific literature, both from individuals seeking to understand the disease and advocates for various treatment options. Including this content helped to politicize scientific research and referenced the history of organizing for access to public health information. In this case, the organizing activity by ACT-UP represented a surge of grassroots activism that led to pressures on the PubMed database, shifting government-funded research to become freely accessible for the first time. Making visible the connection between scholarship and its impact on medical research, Thistlethwaite’s presentation helped to collapse the perceived separation between academia and the general public.

Offering a perspective based on his work through the Office of Library Services (OLS), Andrew McKinney, open education coordinator, described the wider, commercialized landscape of open resources. Given CUNY’s status as the largest urban university in the United States, McKinney described the structure of for-profit companies that sought to capitalize on the interest in OER by offering parallel or ancillary services, including low(er)-cost digital subscriptions and platforms designed to streamline faculty content curation, such as Lumen Learning. It is only through the parallel development of open resources that resulted from state funding (CUNY Academic Commons and OpenLab) that CUNY was able to host and fully control its content, free of external subscription fees.

Instruction Librarians Emily Drabinski (at that time, affiliated with Long Island University) and Jean Amaral (Borough of Manhattan Community College) both touched on the pedagogical implications of assessing resources and integrating “open” into the everyday practices of higher education. Drabinski led a discussion of how to break the top-down dynamic of student/teacher and critically implement structural change within the classroom. Amaral overviewed active learning strategies, using the Framework as a base. A memorable moment for each was Amaral’s cute cat landing slide as a function to break human-set

boundaries or Drabinksi's call-and-response teaching style, reorienting traditional lecture-based classroom dynamics to active participation and iterative conversation.

These presentations were paired with the more practical concerns of how to attribute, determine permissions, and decipher Creative Commons licenses as well as how to share your original or "remixed" content. The primary task of the bootcamp was to create a site on the CUNY Academic Commons through which the fellows would teach their upcoming courses. In order to function as an alternative to Blackboard, the university's primary adopted learning management system, building the site also required that the fellows choose as many zero-cost resources as possible. With on-hand assistance from library faculty and open technologists from the Teaching and Learning Center, along with the use of the Commons platform, the fellows decided the extent to which they would teach "in the open." Considerations of open included whether course sites should be publicly accessible for content as well as student contributions, whether to use plugins, such as the shared annotation tool, Hypothesis, and how to negotiate issues of copyright. The outcome was that most sites utilized openly licensed content, often "remixed" and shared with a wider audience, while only a few relied on a hybrid mix of open and closed material with copyrighted articles hidden behind a password-protected page.

BREAKING OPEN: AN OPEN PEDAGOGY SYMPOSIUM

As the final component of the Open Pedagogy Fellowship, Breaking Open expanded upon much of the content from the OER Bootcamp and shared the work of Open Pedagogy Fellows with an audience of faculty, doctoral students, and MLIS students. The event also included additional librarians, faculty members whose work involves OER, and students of color from local MLIS programs.

In concept and structure, programming was directly inspired by the work of Toronto-based scholar Clelia Rodríguez, whose work includes "#TheShitholesSyllabus: Undoing His(Story)."¹⁹ Rodríguez's work served as an essential tool, a blueprint for navigating the disparate points of entry, through which we were able to pedagogically consider ancestral ties and cross-geographic boundaries. Immediately after reading *Decolonizing Academia*, the prose collection where "#TheShitholesSyllabus" was reprinted, we asked Rodríguez to deliver the keynote address to the symposium. Her keynote was an opportunity to disclose these seemingly hidden conversations of decolonial applications to a closed conference of CUNY graduate students, faculty, and librarians, mostly participants of color.

To be fully transparent, we had to first negotiate with Dr. Rodríguez as to how her work related to open educational resources. This is a significant point to highlight because too often in library literature and critique, we question how to fully integrate conversations of decolonization and anti-racism into our work. These discussions often take the form of temporary diversity and inclusion initiatives, which typically become diluted over time, resulting in an updated policy statement that lives on the library website. The exchange with Dr. Rodríguez was the birth of the notion that applying the ACRL Framework could and did actuate a new realm of possibility in which librarians were activated to engage fully in a decolonial framing. Additionally, through the unwavering demands of this iconic speaker, we were able to test the limits of open and critical pedagogies. The initial Skype conversation went something like this:

“Dr. Rodríguez, it is an honor to meet you, as we really loved your book.”

Librarians smile at Dr. Rodríguez.

“And it is an honor to speak to a woman of color on the other end of this call, as it is not common to find women of color in positions like yours, offering these types of opportunities,” Dr. Rodríguez responds to Professor Smith-Cruz.

The conversation involved some self-reflection, as we had to question and explore our purposes for holding the symposium. We outlined our core needs and, similarly, Dr. Rodríguez outlined her unbending concepts—student-centered, people of color-centered, grounded in ancestral connection, and deconstructing the academy as a potential site of violence. We similarly explained to Dr. Rodríguez that the Breaking Open Symposium addressed concerns of access to resources through a lens that focused on open knowledge practices. We briefly defined “open,” including its many meanings: within the context of scholarly publishing, and an alternative to “closed” scholarship, such as journals that charge high subscription prices, or research hidden behind paywalls. Within our definition, we acknowledged the complexities of its global impact and the ways it put the academy at a specific place of power as it related to publishing. We also explained that this trend emerged alongside “open source” software and other technological resource sharing, as scholars increasingly become an equally reputable alternative to for-profit publishers like Elsevier, whose profit margin exceeded that of Google in 2018.

“How does this relate to students?” Dr. Rodríguez rightfully asked, in response.

We explained that commercial textbook prices have risen dramatically, charging hundreds of dollars per book, and when students are then asked to buy thousands of dollars’ worth of textbooks per year, it becomes an additional, and typically unacknowledged, cost of college. OER represent an alternative: free, openly licensed textbooks that anyone can access through a Wi-Fi connected device. The 2018–19 grant funding that made possible the Breaking Open Symposium in question was intended to deploy OER across CUNY, specifically to address the high cost of textbooks for undergraduate students.

“And how do we bring this to a place of decolonization?” Dr. Rodríguez finally pressed.

“Exactly!” we confirmed. “We’d like to consider questions of labor and access as we embark on state-funded ventures that claim to work for students. We want to investigate more fully our role as pedagogical influencers. We want to ‘break’ the concept of open and critique these shifts in economic allocations.”

“Well, first we must center students. And if you want to truly investigate these considerations, we should focus on students of color,” she insisted.

“We can do that. And since we are talking about economic implications, we can pay students of color for their time and participation and deep engagement.” We decided there and then, without truly considering the logistics.

And with that, she accepted.

What led us to Dr. Rodríguez was her text, *Decolonizing Academia: Poverty, Oppression, and Pain*, which the journal *Radical Teacher* asked Smith-Cruz to review.²⁰ As a librarian of color, she found the text moving and irrevocable. It speaks to the fundamental misalignment between what is considered academic knowledge, and, in a capitalist system, what is permitted to be “known” by its consumers. Rodríguez’s writing was eventually reviewed, but as an immediate response, the work directly built on the ACRL Framework and had to be applied to the symposium that was in formation at an exponential pace. Once the bootcamp was completed, the Symposium had to be planned and coordinated. Acceptance as keynote meant that we could truly put into practice all that had been, until then, only theorized. Information Has Value, particularly in terms of “dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means to influence, and as a means of negotiating and understanding the world.”²¹ The negotiation with Rodríguez was successful, but her information shared would prove to be invaluable.

Rodríguez makes it clear that academic knowledge production is inherently political and implies a particular worldview that actively needs to be unlearned. Her writing is meant to address an audience of color first, directing her language and its application to a spiritual and ancestral connection. The text is written as prose, sometimes poetry, and other times as a letter or directive. This multi-formatted text felt like a poignant example of what many doctoral students experience as gaps in their education—a grounding of their learning and teaching to the world outside, to their lineage, and to their positions as objects of post-colonial baggage and triumph.

One example of Rodríguez’s writing style is in the poetry, prose, and “UNapologetic letters,” where the readers are addressed by type:

“Dear Adjunct, ... You’ve made it. One thousand sacrifices later, you’re a university professor. Signed, Una hija linda.”²²

“Dear future accepted POC applicant, ... You will be receiving a ‘Welcome Package’ in the mail. Read the foot\notes carefully. Signed, A hopeful ghost.”²³

“Dear future accepted POC applicant, ... Trust that fast beat radiating from your chest...”²⁴

“POC academic in the making” is reminded to “keep Audre Lorde in [their] pocket. Repeat her survival words as often as you can, especially her insistence that ‘We were never meant to survive.’”²⁵

Dr. Rodríguez’s letters are as personal as they are political, unapologetically paying homage to shared ancestors such as Audre Lorde and scholars who were unafraid to step beyond the confines of academia to reach their goals of experiential and active learning.

To respond to Dr. Rodríguez’s core principles and pay homage to shared ancestors, we invited twenty-five Graduate Center doctoral and master’s students of color to the symposium and placed a call for applicants to fill the slots for thirteen library students of color, all of whom would attend with financial compensation for their attendance and participation. We structured the symposium to begin with a panel of Open Pedagogy Fellows, followed by Dr. Rodríguez as the keynote speaker, lunch, an interactive activity, and ending with a panel of scholars whose work has implications for discussing race and labor.

During the opening panel, three Open Pedagogy Fellows, Adashima Oyo (Social Welfare PhD candidate), Inés Vañó García (Latin American, Iberian, and Latino Cultures PhD candidate), and Jacob Aplaca (English literature, PhD candidate, Hunter College) shared from their own experiences in converting materials to OER, in courses taught at Brooklyn College, Lehman College, and Hunter College, respectively. Each fellow noted the initial difficulty of the paradigm shift along with the reactions of their students. For Aplaca, the challenge was “to actually build into our syllabi that kind of flexibility and openness necessary for students to make meaningful modifications to the shape and content of our courses.”²⁶ Oyo shared the way her students were “shocked and happy to discover that there is no assigned textbook,” but also the challenges of teaching while in a doctoral program, and the implications of this labor on both her scholarship, teaching, and home life. As Oyo stated plainly, “New adjuncts may struggle and face barriers as they balance multiple demands from teaching students while being a student themselves.”²⁷

There was variation in how the Fellows experienced the process of converting to OER. For some, the replacement was simple. Oyo described her mix of open teaching materials as a plentiful array of “resources from peer-reviewed journals, TEDTalks, news articles, documentaries.”²⁸ Inés Vañó García spoke

of the disconnect between the typical, commercially produced textbooks for Spanish-language instruction, clearly designed for an audience of non-native speakers, and often featuring fictional American students, pictured on their first trip to a Spanish-speaking country. Instead of being relatable, these characters tend to highlight the dissonance between an assumed reader and the native Spanish speakers in her classroom at CUNY.²⁹

The Breaking Open Symposium put forth the idea that diversity/representation is a core issue within the context of open, not an add-on. The event sought to re-frame “open” within larger conversations of access, not compartmentalized within the theoretical plane of copyright and open licensing. As one student participant reflected, “Prior to this event I had never been in a space with predominantly people of color talking about open pedagogy. The open world is sorely lacking the diversity, let alone able to make those spaces inclusive.” Another participant observed, “Having a majority of students of color space set a tone where I felt like I could relax more, engage, and talk honestly about whiteness in relation to educational access.”

Critique of the ACRL Framework asks librarians to consider threshold concepts as replicative of a system that is built toward reifying norms within academia that do not serve as a means of social justice, freedom of oppression, or deconstruction of the academy. Ian Beilin, in his article “Beyond the Threshold: Conformity, Resistance, and the ACRL *Information Literacy Framework for Higher Education*,” for example, acknowledges that “threshold concepts attempt to align information literacy goals with the way that knowledge functions in our existing information system.”³⁰ He goes on to state that “if threshold concepts are cultural constructs, then a critical information literacy must move beyond them somehow.”³¹ The struggle to move outside of an existing system was the experience that participants of the symposium were able to investigate.

“Deconstructing the Syllabus” was an interactive activity that was decidedly chosen to incorporate an outside-the-box, outside-the-system paradigm. We used coffee, salt, sugar, and soil as elements. The room set-up for the symposium had to include round tables that sat eight participants. At the center of each table, a handcrafted lacquered bowl of bright colors and varying print sat atop an unrolled wicker mat with a single element inside. Each group of eight was asked to draw pedagogical inspiration from their centerpiece. In the act of witnessing the colors and smells of the brown fresh-roasted coffee beans, black potters soil, pink crystalline Himalayan salt, or caramel Turbinado sugar, attendees were tasked to review a traditional syllabus and then create their own. Alongside these objects, the prompt asked attendees to cross out any sections of the sample syllabus that indicated a “closed” or otherwise limiting perspective, such as restrictive classroom policies, harsh grading rubrics, expensive required texts.

Revising the syllabus with this immediate context in mind, the resulting syllabi included references to labor, the transatlantic slave trade, environmental justice, trade agreements, and immigration policies. Each of these concepts, directly or indirectly, connects back to considerations of access: who has access to literacy, land, or freedom? These considerations recall the defining infrastructures of our present-day world, marked by historical violence and present-day inequities. In many ways, the reimagining of the syllabus recalled a deeply familiar experience, as it was still used with common starting points—requirements that instill a sense of obedience, rigid expectations, grades, threats of academic failure, and the associated emotions of fear and shame. The connection of these implications of academia and the syllabus as the point of entry into the classroom, the threshold, meant that deconstruction had to begin from the very start, at the root, and from the soil.

To move us forward, in small groups we discussed alternatives to standard thresholds. Professor Carmen Kynard's openly accessible syllabus, "Intersectionality and Activist Research in the Movement for Black Lives: Spring 2018 Graduate Syllabus Zine," was supplied as an example. By creating the syllabus in the form of a zine, Prof. Kynard signals a key difference to students: "As a zine, rather than a syllabus loaded with the usual, tired of pages of rules, rules, and more rules... I take my time explaining how, why, and what we are studying."³² In contrast to the traditional syllabus, a series of requirements, Prof. Kynard's syllabus is expansive, with a welcoming visual aesthetic that includes photographs of #BlackLivesMatter activists, inspirational quotes, and poetry.

In week 6, Prof. Kynard contextualizes the landscape of academia by acknowledging, "We live in a specific organization of knowledge in the academy right now.... We still have to fight for Brown and Black Lives in research in the academy as if we were still in the Jim Crow era." She introduces the week's readings as serving to "(re)inscribe whiteness in the academy," required to contextualize the current environment. The section concludes with an encouragement to "let your connections to Black and Brown communities and youth be your light and source of credibility."³³ By addressing the reader directly, Prof. Kynard breaks the boundary of teacher/student and invites a different type of interaction to emerge. There is no expectation of false neutrality: students are free to bring their own life experience and perspectives to the work.

THE RHETORIC OF OPEN

Does "open" mean transparent? Does it mean "open for business"?
Who gets to decide? That is, whose stories about "open" get told?

— Audrey Watters³⁴

The concept of “open” is an important one to take a closer look at, especially as it gains increasing attention on a national and international level. For the most part, this chapter has discussed “open” as a positive, even neutral, alternative: freely available textbooks and scholarship that offer palpable financial relief to students across CUNY. In many ways, it relates directly to multiple ACRL frames—Information Creation as a Process, Scholarship as Conversation—and would thereby seem like a perfect fit.

However, it is in the nature of the Framework and critical librarianship as a whole to challenge structures in their form of origin. To completely and fully embrace open as a promoted library ethos, we must simultaneously engage with a critical eye any shifts in large-scale, city-wide funding initiatives, the value of the information we share in its allegiance to open, and the resultant impacts of our outreach strategies. A powerful intersection, when we consider the work of Dr. Rodríguez, who targets the structural exploitation of academia, is that the legacy of academia is fraught with colonialism. Rodríguez, for example, innately challenges the presumption that “access” is a positive term: the tension of origin stories and culture are reminders that access is frequently envisioned as a one-way street. The dynamic between researcher and subject, so often troubled and privileging the former group, again highlights the violent compartmentalization of Western thought, the disconnect between forms of knowledge (particularly lived experience) and research praxis.

“Open” is often referred to as universally beneficial, a public good, relying on the ongoing self-justification and promise of a seamlessly interconnected world. As educational technologist and critic Audrey Watters points out, the word itself is fully loaded, connoting a shared identity as knowledge seekers.³⁵ If there are underlying assumptions, they are rarely questioned; the mission implies a transparency that may not always be fulfilled.

Further, what do we mean when we refer to “open knowledge” in the context of higher education? The word “open” is found in multiple contexts (open access, open educational resources, open data, open source, open science), and though there are meaningful distinctions to be made between these terms, the fundamental premise is that information—scholarly or otherwise—should be freely accessible and move with unrestricted access through the world. In her 2015 piece, “A Critical Take on OER Practices: Interrogating Commercialization, Colonialism, and Content,” Sarah Crissinger references Neelie Kroes, building her argument around the ways data has been framed as “the new oil for the digital age.”³⁶ As twenty-first-century nations define themselves through biometric surveillance and data mining, they also push to extend the emerging technological frontier, sometimes disguised as humanitarianism. Crissinger realizes that the move toward “open” is complicated by this backdrop: “I began to reflect on the ways in which I had used, or experienced others’ use of, openness as a

solution for poverty or development—often in a way that was disconnected from an understanding of systemic inequality.”³⁷

Implications of a humanitarian benefit of open knowledge are everywhere. A 2012 brief distributed by The Center for American Progress, a Washington, DC, think-tank, declares, “We are in the midst of a revolution in education. For the first time in human history we have the tools to enable everyone to attain all the education they desire. . . . Because we know how to do this, and it is all but free to do so, we have a moral obligation and ethical responsibility to act.”³⁸ Education is seen as quantifiable, a commodity (“all the education they desire”).³⁹ Allowing knowledge to be free is seen as a potentially revolutionary act, motivated by a self-justifying “moral obligation.”⁴⁰

Educational theorist Paulo Freire famously leveled a critique of traditional education practices, especially the idea that students are passive repositories of information: “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those they consider to know nothing.”⁴¹ We find an echo of this concept in the “moral and ethical responsibility” described above. To reference the questions posed by Audrey Watters: Who has the tools, and who, correspondingly, will be empowered by “all the education they desire?” That the co-authors of the brief are David Wiley, founder of Lumen Learning, a for-profit educational company; Cable Green, of Creative Commons; and Louis Soares, a representative from The Center for American Progress, perhaps tweaks the initial idealism just a bit. When knowledge is set free, who profits?

In her article, “Does Information Really Want to be Free? Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Question of Openness,” Kim Christen questions this culturally pervasive spirit of technological positivity. She references the cultural ethos of “digital utopianism”—the idea that technology always serves a public good. Christen also observes that “the power and appeal of information freedom comes. . . from its connection to deeply emotive and ideological American narratives.”⁴² Given that the phrase “open educational resources” was coined in 2002 at the UNESCO Forum on Open Courseware for Higher Education, “to develop together a universal educational resource available for the whole of humanity,”⁴³ we argue that the rhetoric of “open” is weakened by its claim to solve global inequity. Requiring faculty to consider the origins of course materials from an economic standpoint (finding a free or low-cost equivalent), ultimately represents a profound directional shift. The urgent need to lower course costs must be counterbalanced by an equal focus on materials that fully represent the subject matter. More importantly, diversity and representation must be woven into the development of OER, and not addressed after the fact.

In another context, scholars have observed that while indigenous materials are found in museums and other institutions, “still, many indigenous people

have limited access to their own cultural heritage and may be excluded also from interpreting these objects even when publicly displayed.”⁴⁴ Clearly, there is a gap between the freedom to share information and its beneficiaries, if the original creators of that knowledge are not included and will not share access.

But is access always the goal? David Gaertner notes that open access “has very real consequences for Indigenous peoples, insofar as it contributes to neo-Enlightenment ideologies of entitlement to knowledge.”⁴⁵ He further speculates, “I want to suggest that closure should not be seen as an *end* to the conversation, but as a new beginning. I want to suggest closure as a path to openness.”⁴⁶

In the context of open resources at CUNY, these questions may seem far removed. When we apply the Authority Is Constructed and Contextual frame, our understanding requires deeper context, one that is specific both to the institution and to New York City itself. During the second year of the OER funding (2019–2020), we held a Spring Symposium, Towards an Open Future, which was hosted virtually on April 24, given the recent COVID-19 pandemic closures. Despite the transition to a virtual environment, the event was widely attended, with an international audience from the University of Kashmir, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Victoria, and other far-flung institutions. Audrey Watters was chosen as the open keynote speaker where she addressed the complex possibilities of a future defined by the rise of educational technology in higher education, whose rampant commercialism and interest in platform-based models are now especially evident in the COVID-19 environment. Walis Johnson, a community archivist and artist, provided context to considering the constructed engagement of communities in her Red Line Archive Project, a historiographic look at racialized housing discrimination, which makes clearly visible the unspoken lines that define the physical, New York City-based geography of “open” and “closed.”⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

The Graduate Center Library chose to focus its programming for OER funding on course conversion and pedagogy. The term most closely aligned with open resources is “open pedagogy.” First introduced in the 1970s, it originally referenced “learner-centered teaching approaches that were inspired by theorists such as John Dewey and Jean Piaget.”⁴⁸ In its current state, open pedagogy is composed of previously existing narratives and educational theories; several tenets of critical library instruction, for example, dovetail with the goal of student-centered learning as well as the concepts within the ACRL Framework.

Critical librarianship examines systems of power, which deeply shape the ways we learn about and structure information. As scholar Troy Swanson describes, “Instructors and librarians should pose questions and create assignments that make implicit beliefs more explicit. The students should be challenged to

examine the origins and implications of these beliefs. How do these beliefs align with other beliefs? How should they be altered in the light of new information sources?”⁴⁹ These types of questions address knowledge at the granular level, asking how information is defined, packaged, and given structural importance. Grounded by Clelia Rodriguez’s decolonial philosophy, the structures were newly highlighted and with added depth.

In terms of selecting materials for the classroom, open knowledge practices can directly address this hierarchical tension, questioning the origins of academic writing and introducing non-scholarly sources and non-canonical works. In OER programming held at The Graduate Center, the ACRL Framework often served as a guide, helping to contextualize topics within the library and brought to the surface their underlying intersections with concepts like authority, knowledge, and power. Through the 2019 and 2020 OER bootcamps and symposiums, we sought to challenge the dynamics that shape higher education at CUNY in terms of race and inclusion, ultimately bringing a tangible participatory challenge to the structures of academic knowledge production as a whole.

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