

Nicole ([00:01](#)):

Welcome back to, into the open. In this episode, I get to pick the brain of Dr. Barb Brown, the Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning at the Werklund School of Education, the University of Calgary. In most of my episodes, I started off by asking my guests what sparked their interest in open. But for me, this episode was particularly interesting because of course, designed by a team, including Dr. Brown is what started me on my journey into the open. The #EdTechEthics course had a huge impact on me and a lot of the other students in that program. And I really wanted to understand how it was designed and the why behind that. So come join me on this journey as we dig into co-design.

Nicole ([00:47](#)):

Yeah -. Okay - Perfect. Okay, so we're going to, let's get this, we're figuring it out. The first question I wanted to ask is how did You first become involved?

Barb ([01:01](#)):

Let's see. So my first introduction to open education was through, one of my graduate students, Dr. Verena Roberts. So when she was working on her doctoral studies, that's when I first, became introduced to the concepts around open education and really inspired by her research and her work. And, and then as we started to work together and she, became a sessional instructor and was teaching in a program that I coordinate, I learned more about open education and we started to brainstorm ideas together around how this could be incorporated in a graduate program.

Nicole ([01:44](#)):

So before the EdTech ethics course you hadn't used or really knew much about open education?

Barb ([01:51](#)):

No, I didn't really know much about it until I met Verena and, you know, learned about her research and became immersed in it and then as we continued along this open journey, I then started to recognize some of the, pedagogies that I was using, fit into that framework and category, but also recognized some of the things that I wasn't doing and, learned much more about open educational resources that you know, that I wasn't aware of at the time.

Nicole ([02:29](#)):

So where did the idea of having the students co-developer co-design a OER come from?

Barb ([02:36](#)):

So that really evolved, I would say from a team approach. And so the ideas were sparked by some of the previous research as I had mentioned, that Verena was involved in and then, coming together with not only Verena, but also Dr. Michelle Jacobson and Christie Hurrell who was also part of the project team, as we looked at developing a proposal for research. That's where a lot of the ideas started to, to come about. Now that happened in parallel to the program and the courses already being developed and underway. And so, as we were thinking about, the #EdTechEthics or Ethics in a technology course, that was part of the master's program. That's when we started to think about what could we do in that course, that we could incorporate some of these co-design elements to increase student engagement, but also to help develop assignments in the course that would be authentic and that students would be able to use and connect to their professional contexts.

Nicole ([03:51](#)):

Can you help me a little bit, because I actually in, presentations mess this up, what is co-design cause sometimes I'll call it co-creation and sometimes I say co-development and I mess it up all of the time. So what is co-design

Barb ([04:06](#)):

And you know, I mess it up a lot as well. I would say I mess it up because, I'm continuing to develop my understanding of co-design as we're doing this work. So I would say my understanding has shifted. I really see co-design as a shift to a more human centered approach, to really looking at the ways in which the students can be involved during all phases of development. So I use the analogy of, you know, when there is a new system, a new software or a technological system is introduced. We often invite the end user to come in and do some testing. And so, they're part of one particular phase. And similarly with students in the classroom, we often invite them to be part of the learning that's already been thought about and structured and designed by the instructor.

Barb ([05:12](#)):

And they come in during the course or the time that they're together with the instructor. And so they're only there for component of it. And so similarly with software, if you were to have the end users involved, right from the beginning, in terms of designing and testing and being part of all of those phases, I would see that as being more of a co-design experience. And so how do we then emulate that in the classroom experience? How do we, involve the students right from the beginning? So that they're part of something that the instructor has possibly not even thought of in terms of where they might go with that particular inquiry that they will be involved in. And so that's what we tried to do in that particular course is to offer students with a co-design experience and opportunity to work alongside the instructor and other experts, to be able to design something that was not designed for them instead, they were in charge of that particular design and inquiry.

Nicole ([06:20](#)):

Would you say, cause I am starting to see certain areas as far as it particularly knowledge building, but where does that overlap with the values of open education? So the idea of sharing and collaborating, how do those two kind of come together?

Barb ([06:33](#)):

Yes. And I think there is a lot of overlap and, and this would be the part that was new learning for me. So, the idea of co-design was not new. This was something that I already valued in terms of my philosophy of teaching and incorporating, it didn't matter if I was teaching in K to 12 or in higher education, it was an aspect of learning, providing that active experiential learning opportunity to students that I value and try to incorporate in my own teaching. But then in terms of the open part, what I see as being important is that the involvement in the learning includes others beyond just the students and the instructor. And so often the teaching experience, when you ask students about their, the quality of their learning experience, they frame it within a course and it's usually framed with, you know, instructors and students that were in that particular course.

Barb ([07:37](#)):

And one of the things we really tried to do that, you know, aligns with openness and in education as well, is to allow for the learning, to take place in a space that allows for others to be involved as well. And so involving outside experts and, and bringing them into the class is one way of doing that, having a guest speaker or, having someone come in and give feedback, but allowing the learning to take place in a public place where students are either blogging or posting in social media, sharing their work, reaching out to experts in the field to seek input, that extends it a little bit further.

Nicole ([08:15](#)):

Oh, that's gotta be such a difficult earth nerve-wracking balance. If you're working for an institution you're working for the university and then you're going, but we're going to take some of those public and you lose a bit of control. I think when you, you go out or you go external to that whole little learning system, and that's gotta be a bit frightening,

Barb ([08:33](#)):

You know, that's a really good point, Nicole. It is challenging when you start to make learning more visible and start to make learning accessible in public places. There's that risk of critique, both for the instructor and for the students feeling like I'm sharing draft work and, you know, when someone's going to critique it. So, it's definitely, it's a risk that we take in learning. There's also so many more benefits in offering the learning experience that allows for others to contribute, provides that opportunity to extend learning in ways that, you know, like I say, an instructor might not even imagine. I think it also recognizes that knowledge is not held within one individual or a set of resources that are only part of what the instructor has deemed as being important for that particular course. It allows for exploration outside of the boundaries of that class space and allows for learning to occur for both students and instructors. And I think that's the power of co-design and really empowering learners as active agents in their learning.

Nicole ([09:50](#)):

It really changed. I felt anyways from being in the course, it changed that instructor, student dynamic quite a bit like it, it just disrupted the rules, which I found very interesting. I hadn't experienced that in higher ed at all before.

Barb ([10:06](#)):

And, you know, and from my perspective as a coordinator, one of the things that I thought felt different for me was noticing that the learning continued on beyond the duration of the course and beyond the duration of the program. So, you know, I had the privilege of working with the students in the final course and being able to take what had occurred in terms of developing that open educational resource and the third course, a little bit further and, allowing for the students to think about, okay, how could they lead this work and now take this work even further, but what I was impressed by was how this continued into the following year as we were developing the resource, how this continued in terms of mentorship and how former students were coming in and mentoring new students, both in public online, social media spaces, as well as formally being invited into the class and being part of conversations. So, that for me was something that I had not necessarily experienced in other courses that I've been involved in.

Nicole ([11:21](#)):

It's quite exciting, really like from, from both a student and instructor and designers perspective, if you can keep that going. And I know there's lots of courses I'm interested in, but I finished and I'm done moving on into the next one. So to see students continuously like come back for Twitter chats or come back and connect through blogging and commenting, it's created kind of, we call it the hive - we've created this little buzz. Is there anything that you were really hesitant about when you jumped into this? Was there any, you were like, Ooh, I don't know. I don't know about this part of open.

Barb ([11:53](#)):

Yes. I think one of the things that I wondered about was both from the student perspective as you know, a current student, but also thinking about in future. So, if our master's students decide they want to go on and, apply to be in a doctoral program, will this publication that we've worked so hard to put together, will this be worthy of consideration for applying into a doctoral program or any other type of, opportunities that the students might have in terms of their employment, will this be a benefit to them? So I was really looking at the authenticity of the assignment and, the work that we were putting together. Would others value it and want to read this resource? And so I think that was the part that I wondered about. You know, once you put it out there and it's in a press book, is it something that will continue to be dynamic because that's another part, that's really important to me, when it's an online resource like this, is it something that's just static and dated and then no one really goes to it anymore, or how will we manage to keep it dynamic?

Barb ([13:11](#)):

And I think, I think that's been part of the learning for me around open education as well. And just the value of the creative commons license that we attached to the material, how we involved, so many reviewers that were part of providing that review of the work and indicating that it is legitimate and a high quality work. All of that combined, I think helped reassure me in that aspect, but it was something I wondered about.

Nicole ([13:47](#)):

Now that you've gone through two cycles of this with students, would you say there's any downfall to doing a project? So if another instructor or designer wanted to get involved and bring this concept of creating co-creating, co-designing a press book, are there any downfalls or red flags or things you'd be like, please make sure you're aware of this before you jump in.

Barb ([14:10](#)):

Well, it definitely did take a community, to do this in both cycles. And, you know, in the first cycle we also had some funding. So having the funding that accompanied the project so that we could conduct research and also pay for additional expenses like copy editing in terms of polishing the final work, those pieces were helpful as well. But I think the team that worked on the project was the critical piece and that this isn't something that is easy to do alone. And because it is an open education project, it does involve a community. And so I think if that community is not already established, then my suggestion would be to form a community first, before embarking on a project like this.

Nicole ([15:06](#)):

In some ways you could say it takes a village to raise a press book. Um, the team that created the #EdTechEthics course, would you agree was quite diverse in their comfort levels and working with open education?

Barb ([15:18](#)):

You know, as we engaged in this project, I think we all recognized that we were doing work that connected to open education. And I think that this was a way to also bring us together and to find those intersections in our work and to start to recognize ourselves in this conversation. I think it's still fairly new out there. And even with the professional learning sessions that we're offering, we're not attracting as many for example, as we are to a session around assessment. And I think it's just because of the newness around the terms. And so I think that the more that we become accustomed to, recognizing that open education is not just open educational resources and it's not just about creating free resources to reduce costs. I think it's important that we do make things openly accessible and that we're not always attaching costs to accessing knowledge and information but it's not the only aspect of open education. And so it's the pedagogical parts that then I'm really passionate about. And others are passionate about different components, but I think it's just finding ourselves in that conversation.

Nicole ([16:41](#)):

Tell me a little bit more about the development or the planning for this course. I know it was one course in a set of four. So how did that work and what did that look like

Barb ([16:51](#)):

When we planned this co-design experience, we all had different perspectives in terms of how we were planning and going about it. And so as an academic coordinator, I was looking at it from the whole program and where would this be situated within the program? So in the four course certificate, there were two courses that led up to the experience and then one course that followed, the experience. And so I had to think about how would I prepare the instructors that are teaching the two previous courses so that they were engaging in activities with the students that still met the program goals and the learning outcomes of the courses, but also provided some foundational experiences for the students so that they would be ready and prepared to engage in an inquiry that would allow them to prepare a chapter for the pressbook.

Nicole ([17:54](#)):

What were some of those things?

Barb ([17:56](#)):

So, for example, in the first course, in the summer when the students are first introduced to the program, one of the key assignments that the students work on is a précis where they're working individually and in teams to start to think about how do you critically analyze literature? So how do you take a look at someone else's research project, the article that they've written about it, and how do you unpack that and take a critical stance? So I'll just give you some, a couple of examples in the second course. The students are then engaged in looking at, particular technologies that they are interested in that might relate to some of the work in their professional context. And then they engage in a more in-depth literature review. So now they've learned how to look at one individual article, so that then in the second course, they can look at a set of articles or literature that they've gathered and start to synthesize that in a way that would be in the form of a literature review, which then provides a foundation for that third course.

Barb ([19:15](#)):

When now they're looking at specifically an area that has an ethical component to it. And so in some cases, some of the students were able to continue building on each of those layered assignments, so that by the time they got to that third course, they were, they might still be looking at the same topic or a different topic, now they had that choice, but they have that foundation already built on how do I go find an article. How do I then critically analyze this literature that I found, and now how do I write it up in such a way that, that I have an opinion around the ethical components or limitations around this particular topic. And then I would argue that in the fourth course, because they've already written this, now they look at it from a leadership perspective. And so, regardless of what position you're in and your professional context, what can you do in terms of leading the way or leading change in this particular area? And so that's kind of a recap of the four courses and how creating a chapter in a pressbook fit into the whole program.

Nicole ([20:32](#)):

It's interesting because I don't think, well as a I'm, again, coming from a student perspective, like I did not have the research skills necessary at the beginning of, of this four course journey to be able to do that. There's no way like if that was presented at, in the first course, or if I just dropped into a course and had to create and write a chapter, there's an, I would, yeah, I did not have the research skills. So it's interesting knowing now I wish I'd kept the same topic for the whole thing. I probably would have had a higher quality product in the end, but, it's interesting to see that was designed for, I didn't know that, but it makes complete sense that it would be hard as an instructor if you were like, I like this idea. I like this concept. I just want to use it and to use it in isolation, it would be incredibly difficult if your students don't have those basic building blocks to be able to, to fully write a chapter. Like that's a huge one. I wouldn't have thought of that actually, when creating, creating OER, there's all these other things and components, but the actual ability to academically write was probably, and research was probably pretty far at the top.

Barb ([21:45](#)):

Yes, and I think that's one of the challenges, you know, to think about how do we do this in the context of a program rather than in the context of a single course, what is it that we can do with, supporting students in more of a scaffolded process along the way? Rather than thinking about, well, I can't do this because it's just not possible in a 13 week timeframe. Whereas if you look at what was accomplished and, you know, I often say it was a yearlong activity really from the beginning stages in that preliminary foundational work to when the actual writing occurred to the follow-up then editing, copy editing, and getting it to the final production stages. Actually, it was actually more than a year because students started in the summer and we didn't produce the final press book until, the end of the following year.

Nicole ([22:43](#)):

Do you think that's a bit of a deterrent for other instructors or other places, other faculties using something like this or, or integrating this co-design element into their courses?

Barb ([22:56](#)):

Yes, I do think it could be a deterrent because, it might not seem manageable, you know, again, if you're working with a small team or on your own, then it might not seem like a manageable task. Whereas having that team really helped with that and helped, keep the momentum going through the project. I also think that there could be, different adaptations, which, you know, we're already starting to think about for this coming year, because we do have a larger cohort as well. And so we're thinking about how

might we adapt this. So it's still an open assignment or product that the students create that they could use in similar ways, but maybe it might look a little bit different. Does it need to be a chapter in a book?

Nicole ([23:51](#)):

I do want to add into that, after this, the students move into their third year and they can do a capstone project. So as much as this was just designed for those four courses, I think, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I feel like you probably had that in the back of your mind as well, because I felt like I was so much more prepared to take on a capstone project because I'd already gone through the process once versus students that were in my cohort for that last year that were trying to jump into research. And were just, they felt like they were light years behind. So I think it's important to note that it is a three-year process and this is one year of that three years, but I definitely think that you probably thought of that and structured it so that I would succeed

Barb ([24:39](#)):

Well. Exactly. And I think that having the work take place in an open environment also contributed to the attraction to that particular master certificate. There's no doubt that, you know, seeing a link to the pressbook and seeing work of the students, and with the work being public that I think it did help us in attracting more students. I also think on the downside of that, is that perhaps having that example of a pressbook, which many students looked at as an exemplar may have also, contributed to fear for some students in seeing that final polished product and thinking their chapter might not be good enough, or, they weren't, they didn't feel like it was at the same writing level and for whatever reason may not have wanted to contribute to the next iteration of the book.

Nicole ([25:44](#)):

I know right now, you're involved in creating webinars for UofCalgary about open education to help spread the word and, and inform others. If you were talking to another professor who was maybe hesitant about getting involved in open education, would you have any wise words.

Barb ([26:02](#)):

I would say to to be kind to yourself and to not have an expectation that all of the terms or all of the possibilities, but instead to just have a willingness to take a risk and to start to work in an area that maybe might feel uncomfortable and to be okay with that discomfort and to work alongside and with your students. I think that was the part that I enjoyed the most is to work alongside as co-designers with the students and with the instructors that were part of the program and the members of the research team and the research assistants. Everyone who was part of this project, really made it so worthwhile. So I would say, go easy on yourself and be okay with that discomfort.

Nicole ([27:05](#)):

Find a, find a community and find a good, strong, powerful team and you'll be all right. Awesome. Anything else you want to add? Because we've got through all of our questions,

Barb ([27:18](#)):

Yes there, there is one piece and again, I don't know if you want to include this or not, but, one of the things that I noticed, that was a little bit different between the two cohorts and I don't know if it had to do with the time period. So, one cohort was writing their chapters and selecting their topics during a

time when COVID was at the very early stages and for some of us we hadn't even really heard about COVID yet. And then it just came about closer to the end of the course, when this was taking place. So the topics had already been selected. And then in the second cohort, we were full into the COVID global pandemic. And that is when the students had selected their topics. And so I really noticed a difference in the topics that were selected and also willingness to contribute to the book. So I'm just wondering if those topic differences and that willingness to contribute to the book also was affected by COVID? So, it's just a question I have.

Nicole ([28:36](#)):

You say that the second cohort, they had more controversial topics, because there is something that's more relevant in that context, because we'd been through six months, however many months of working within a pandemic.

Barb ([28:52](#)):

I don't know if I would say more controversial, but I would say that they were all more connected to online teaching, remote, emergency access to teaching. That would have been a common thread. Whereas in the previous year we did see some topics that were not necessarily related to online. And then in the second year I found that there was some more hesitancy to contribute to the book. And again just not sure about why.

Nicole ([29:29](#)):

Right we're speculating as to why

Barb ([29:31](#)):

Exactly that's my speculation, you know, is it the fatigue? I can't do one more thing right now.

Nicole ([29:41](#)):

Have it, it, cause it is quite the process after it's not like I'm done the course it's over. And so people perhaps were like, I just don't have it in me to keep going through this, but I don't know. I, it could be, they're also relevant. They could have, people are trying to write about things that are relevant if it's going to be out in the public and they definitely pick some.

Barb ([30:01](#)):

Yes, exactly. And so it was kind of like did they pick these different topics because they could see the example. And so they kind of knew where we were going with this. Whereas the first time through, it was almost like we're kind of working through this as we go. And, when we don't have an example to show you, was it because of that or was it the context and the time period? And so will these kinds of, resources provide for us a snapshot in time and be able to tell us that these were the topics of interest that students were looking at in this time period?

Nicole ([30:39](#)):

It's historical in some ways you're writing a bit of a historical piece. That's really interesting, that adds another layer onto it, which is fascinating.

Barb ([30:49](#)):

Well, it provides that rationale for why should we do this. Why do we need to do this? You know, it's also a way to capture that time period.

Nicole ([30:58](#)):

Right? It's authentic, it's as authentic as possible. If you're, you're bringing up what your current state is.

Barb ([31:04](#)):

Yes. And most often class assignments that are disposable, you know, as they say in the literature, I've used that I've heard that term frequently. So, how we want to move to these non-disposable assignments because often they're disposable and not seen or read by others. Whereas this makes it accessible and read by others and can look and you can look at it with a different lens, like a historical time period kind of view.

Nicole ([31:39](#)):

Well, particularly with educational technology, because it's always shifting, always changing, always growing. And so it fits really nicely with that because it's very hard to design a course that you could use for the next 10 years. Things are going to, to shift in the next 10 minutes. So very interesting. Cool. Well, thank you so, so very, very much.

Barb ([32:02](#)):

Well, thank you, Nicole. I hope that you know, that helped me too, I hope I answered your questions and will make for a good podcast. We'll see.

Nicole ([32:20](#)):

So as a student who was involved in a co-design course, I can definitely vouch for there being power to it. I want to thank Dr. Brown. So very much for answering all of my questions today. If you've ever been curious about co-designing open educational resources or creating open educational resources with your students, it's definitely worth checking out their team's work. I'll link some of the articles below. Thanks so much for joining me on my journey into the open today. I hope you discovered a little bit more and then built your understanding until next time.

Barb ([33:16](#)):

Thank you.