Discovering Open Education Through Work-Integrated Learning

Josie: Hi, everyone! Happy Open Education Week. I am glad you could join us for this conversation about work-integrated learning and open education. We know there are a lot of incredible webinars this week, so we wanted to try something a little bit different. This event is audio only, and it's asynchronous. We recorded it in advance and are releasing it for Open Education Week so you can listen to it at any time. In addition, we have a transcript available, so you can choose if you'd rather read or listen. Whatever works best for you.

This conversation is an interview between me and my colleagues, where they talk about their experiences as university students who got into open education through co-op work terms with BCcampus. You will hear their reflections on their time as students and on education in general, as well as how their different areas of study factor into their current work in open education. It's a really great conversation, and I hope you enjoy.

[Instrumental music fades in and out]

Introductions

Josie: So let's start with a round table of introductions. My name is Josie Gray, and I will be facilitating this conversation. I am an uninvited settler on the lands of the Lekwungen-speaking Peoples, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, as well as the W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples. I work on the open education team at BCcampus as the manager of production and publishing. And in this role I oversee the production and publication of OER projects that BCcampus funds and support people in creating OER that are well designed and accessible. I also manage the B.C. Open Textbook Collection, which is a collection of over 300 open textbooks. I've been with BCcampus for just over five years, and I started working here as an undergraduate co-op student at the University of Victoria, where I was studying history and professional communication. And then last June I graduated with a master of design in inclusive design from OCAD University. And I will pass it to Kaitlyn.

Kaitlyn: I am coordinator of open textbook publishing at BCcampus. I am based in the traditional, ancestral territories of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations of the Lekwungen People as well as the W̱SÁNEĆ People. And last summer I just graduated from the University of Victoria with a bachelor of arts in linguistics and psychology. My journey with open education started in summer 2019, when I was a co-op student at BCcampus. And after I graduated last year, I was very fortunate and had the chance to get back to working in open education. And should I pass it back to Josie, or —?

Josie: How about you just pick someone to go next.

Kaitlyn: Okay. Arianna, you are right below me.

Arianna: My name is Arianna Cheveldave. I am speaking today from the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples. I am coordinator, open education at BCcampus. I have worked for BCcampus and in the field of open education since 2019, when I

was hired—with Kaitlyn—as a co-op student to help produce open textbooks for BCcampus. My job now consists more of sending a lot of emails, but I also work on textbooks still. My academic background is in writing and professional communication. I completed my undergraduate degree from the University of Victoria in 2021. And I will pass it to Harper.

Harper: Hi, my name is Harper Friedman. I am joining you from the unceded territories of the Lekwungen-speaking Peoples. I work at BCcampus as a coordinator on the open textbook publishing team. And I'm a recent graduate from the University of Victoria, and I joined BCcampus initially as a co-op student and am now working here full time.

Josie: Thanks. Harper. Do you want to tell everyone what you majored in?

Harper: Yeah, I majored in a combined major of music and computer science. Kind of funky *[laughs]*.

Josie: Awesome. Good to give people an appreciation of the various backgrounds that we all come from.

Key Terms

Josie: Okay, so to start off the conversation, I thought we could go through some definitions of just some terms we might be throwing around. Just in case people who are listening might be new to open education. So I've given you each a term or a phrase, and your task is to give me a 30-second explanation for someone who has never heard of it before. So Kaitlyn, you are up first with *BCcampus*.

Kaitlyn: Here is the official answer: that BCcampus is funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training. We work with the Ministry and the post-secondary institutions in B.C. to create a better teaching and learning experience for faculty, staff, and students. And for what matters to you today, one of our major projects is to make open textbooks that are free for anyone, anywhere to use.

Josie: Awesome. Thank you. Okay, Arianna, you have *Creative Commons licences*.

Arianna: Okay. I didn't time it, but here we go.

Josie: *[Laughs]*. That's okay.

Arianna: A Creative Commons licence is a licence that a creator can apply to their work to issue certain permissions to anyone who would like to use the work. A Creative Commons licence might allow you to freely copy, share, edit, and remix an original work, depending on the terms of the specific licence. Anyone may apply a Creative Commons licence to their original work.

Josie: Wonderful. Thank you. Okay, Harper, you have *open educational resources*.

Harper: All right, so, open educational resources (or OER) are materials like textbooks and instructional videos that are licensed under an open licence — in our case, Creative Commons licence — which allows people to use and distribute these materials for free and even adapt them, depending on the specifics of the licence.

Josie: Wonderful. Thank you all.

Experience of Open Education in University

Josie: So the first question that I have for you is: Is there anything related to open education that you had the chance to experience as a student? And if not, what do you wish you had experienced as a student? And I will pass that to Harper to answer first.

Harper: Yeah, so I didn't … When I was in school, I didn't know this was OER, but in one of my electrical engineering courses, my professor, Michael David Adams, wrote and published his own textbook with corresponding lecture slides on Google Books that he has available for free as PDFs. And I actually looked it up for this interview, and I did find out the newest version is under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence. So you could buy a physical copy of the book if you wanted, but you only paid for printing, so it was really cheap. And then otherwise I had several professors that abhorred the textbook industry and would simply use their own slides, and sometimes they would just adapt from other professors' work with, like, attribution.

Josie: Awesome, thank you. How about for you, Kaitlyn?

Kaitlyn: I very fortunately had two psychology professors using open textbooks from BCcampus. And it was the *Research Methods in Psychology* and *Principles of Social Psychology*. As a millennial/Gen Z student, I always appreciate the flexibility and portability of digital formats. And having those online and open textbooks that were accessible with no financial barriers — and fortunately, little technical barriers for me — definitely greatly improved my learning experience in those two courses.

Josie: Awesome. Yeah, that's great to hear. And how about for you, Arianna?

Arianna: Well, I was fortunate enough to be in a lot of courses that we might call "zero textbook cost," but no one used that term. A lot of the courses I was in, we just used library materials or online articles or what have you. And as far as open educational resources, none of my instructors were really, like, explicit practitioners of open pedagogy. But I did do a number of assignments over time that had repercussions and uses beyond the classroom. I was a writing student, and I did a five-year plan full of, like, places where I could send my work, programs I might want to do later after undergrad. I did some mock book proposals. And the courses in my professional communication minor usually had practical, hands-on assignments, and I really liked those. If I could go back in time and have some control over my curriculum, I would add in a Wikipedia assignment. I really love the idea of adding to the collective knowledge of humanity in such a concrete way. I have a friend in grad school right now who is going to do a Wikipedia

assignment, and her mind was kind of blown at the idea that this was something that was possible, and she seems really excited. So it got me jealous.

Josie: Yeah, that's awesome. And great to see all of those examples of what open pedagogy might look like in different subject areas and also some of the textbooks that are being used out there, so thanks, everyone.

What About Your Field of Study is Useful in Open Education?

Josie: My next question is: Have you found anything about your field of study helpful when working in open education? And I will pass that to Kaitlyn first.

Kaitlyn: Well, studying linguistics and psychology is not super directly related to what we do here, but I have to say my linguistics background sometimes really helps with decoding those HTML syntax. Otherwise it's really the open mindset that is essential for open education that is also in the field of linguistics and psychology as well. In linguistics, we say there is no standard form of language, and in psychology, there could be so many different theories explaining the same phenomenon. Similarly, with open education and OERs, OER could be in many different formats. There could be so many different ways of creating, using, and adapting OERs, and we are always trying to develop new ways of doing it.

Josie: Yeah. I would say one of the examples that first comes to my mind is you working on the *Psychology of Language* open textbook *[laughs]*.

Kaitlyn: Oh, yeah, definitely. Cause I used a $200 textbook for my psycholinguistic courses. So when I saw that textbook, I was instantly jealous of its existence after I graduated.

Josie: Yeah. So this a *Psychology of Language* textbook authored by Dinesh Ramoo at Thompson Rivers University that Kaitlyn worked quite a bit on, getting it to meet accessibility guidelines and including lots of audio recordings of all of the different sounds to give examples in the text. Arianna, how about for you?

Arianna: Well, my role when I am working on textbooks often involves reviewing and formatting open textbooks that are in progress. This is very detailed work that requires me to keep track of things like style decisions and figure numbering. In my writing and professional communication degree, I was taught how to copyedit and learned to pay attention to things like style, tone, and paragraphing to see if there is a better way to communicate something. Therefore, I'm often the one who is asked to copyedit a book, if needed. My background has also helped me learn to identify when sections need more information or when they can be scaled back. I also did take an elective course that taught me some basic HTML, which has come in a lot of handy in my work.

Josie: For sure. And how about for you, Harper?

Harper: Yeah, so, as I mentioned earlier, my major was combined music and computer science, and I've definitely found my knowledge in computer science to be the more helpful of the two

— at least here. I mainly work on textbooks, formatting and ensuring the material is accessible, and my programming skills are directly transferable to this task, whether it be formatting in HTML or creating math equations in LaTeX. And also, my math knowledge has helped in reworking explanations of math concepts into more accessible formats, or just noticing when equations are not quite correct.

Josie: Yeah, absolutely. Having your math knowledge has been extremely valuable when trying to work through some of this complex math content.

How Has Open Education Impacted Your Perspective?

Josie: Okay. How has working in open education impacted your perspective on your field of study and/or education in general? Arianna?

Arianna: Well, working in open education, and with open textbooks specifically, has kind of sent me into an existential crisis regarding the organization Access Copyright and the rights of Canadian authors to receive payment for their work. In school, I distinctly remember being told a story of how Canadian authors used to receive money when university instructors would photocopy and distribute their work — kind of like a royalty, basically. They register with Access Copyright, and they get a tiny cheque. At some point, the law changed so that authors no longer receive this money. The vast majority of authors in Canada cannot make a living from writing, so every source of income from their writing counts for something. Recently, there was a legal decision made that upheld the idea that authors do not need to be paid for the right to photocopy their work in educational settings. (I didn't go back and research this extensively, so I can't cite which court decided this or anything. Do your research, unlike me, by reading this *University Affairs* article about York University and Access Copyright.) So for a time my Twitter feed was a mix of authors disagreeing with this ruling and asserting that they deserve to be paid for their work and people in open education saying that this was a win for educators. I agree that people deserve to be paid for their labour, obviously, and they shouldn't be forced to share what they don't want to; that's why open licences are optional, not mandatory. But is photocopying a short story for distribution in a class really something that should come with a cost? I really don't know how to feel about this anymore.

Josie: Yeah, for sure. It's definitely complicated, balancing rights of authors and the ability for people to make a living off of the work that they produce. And also, education is not affordable, and to put the money onto students ... Yeah, it is definitely very complicated. Thanks for sharing. And how about you, Harper?

Harper: Yeah, so working in open education has mostly opened my eyes to the potential of education. Open education alleviates, like, many problems that I faced as a student: namely, cost of textbooks and materials or access to files that work with, like, the technology that I had. It also challenges the kind of exclusivity of academia to those who can afford it. Being able to use, share, and adapt peer-reviewed educational materials for free makes quality information accessible to anybody, not just those who can afford hundreds of dollars of textbooks or subscriptions to academic journals, or those who are granted access to these materials through the post-secondary institution they attend. I always knew it was, like, possible, but it made me

excited to learn that there *were* people actively working on it and that I can now contribute to that effort.

Josie: Yeah, for sure. And Kaitlyn?

Kaitlyn: I always believed that education should be accessible for everyone, anywhere, without barriers. And through my childhood, growing up, I learned that people can receive very different educations based on where they live and what they pay for tuition and just the different backgrounds. And with open education, that's really the spirit of it: to make education accessible for everyone, everywhere. And I know that it is a very ideal idea that is far from our current realistic world, and I hope that, through our work in open education, we are trying to reduce the barriers and make education more accessible for everyone.

Josie: Mhmm. For sure.

What Do You Find Interesting About Your Work in Open Education?

Josie: What do you find the most interesting about open education and/or the work that you do? Harper?

Harper: I'd say that … Probably, it's that the — this work exposes me to a lot of subjects and ideas that I probably never would've explored by myself, particularly in the trades, such as, like, plumbing and electrician work. I really love learning, and I absorb quite a bit of the material that I work on while just doing the production work. So, like, if I ever need to create a pattern for a pipe fitting, I know how to do that now *[laughs]*. I've also worked on some psychology and business textbooks and videos, which are both subjects I've had interest in but never really studied.

Josie: For sure. Cool. Kaitlyn?

Kaitlyn: I echo with Harper here. I would never imagine myself reading a plumbing book if this was not my job. And yeah, I always love to see how others share and use the OERs we develop, what they say about it, and how they adapt it in different contexts or even remix and turn it into a new resource. There are so many possibilities, and it always brings us new insights and perspectives. And I remember back in my co-op term that BCcampus was mentioned by someone in Slovenia, I think? Yeah, that was really fun to see. And even though I probably did not do much related to the Slovenia thing, but I felt that sense of achievement in me.

Josie: Cool, yeah. Arianna?

Arianna: What I find interesting and invigorating about open education is learning that there are different ways to do things. What I and many others have conceived of as the way things are done in education, from textbooks to assignments to classrooms, is not the only way to do things. I love learning about instructors who give co-creation assignments, who give renewable assignments, who design class charters together and have empathy and compassion for their students. I like being part of something that seems like an inherent force for good in the world.

Josie: For sure.

Favourite Project So Far?

Josie: Okay. My last question is: What is the favourite project that you've been involved with so far? And I will pass it to Kaitlyn.

Kaitlyn: I would say it's the [Mental Health and Wellness Training Series](#) because it's related to my academic background, and I was very involved throughout the development process and really got into the backstage of adapting and creating an open resource. I was also working super closely with the authors, so there are a few days that I have 70+ emails in my inbox just from the team, cause we were just settling down some final details for the work. And two of the resources in the series were designed for students, so we also worked with a wonderful group of student authors to write the practice scenarios and also provide feedback. And there are also some very cool H5P interactivities, and the entire series had some special accessibility design around it, so you will have a different user experience with the web book versions in Pressbooks versus the export PDF versions. And yeah, I am quite proud of that project.

Josie: Awesome. Where would people find this project?

Kaitlyn: On the BCcampus website on the Projects page under [Mental Health and Wellness](#).

Josie: Awesome, thank you. And Harper?

Harper: This isn't directly related to my open education work, but I'd say my favourite project so far that I've been involved with here has been the radio show. I am a tech producer for the show *Lunchable Learning*, hosted by Leva Lee and Helena Prins from the Learning and Teaching team here at BCcampus. They interview a new guest every week on the topic of education, and this month they are sharing the limelight with Tim Carson and Clint Lalonde from the Open Education team. It allows me to flex my creativity and utilize the combined aspect of my computer science and music degree. It's also just a joy to work with both of them. They are both really lovely people. And otherwise, more related to my OE work, I'd say I really like working on math books, because I like math. Probably an unreasonable amount.

Josie: *[Laughs]* Where would people find the *Lunchable Learning* stuff?

Harper: Yeah, so we actually have a website: [LunchableLearning.OpenEd.ca](#). And that is where Leva posts blogs about upcoming guests, and that's also where you can find the recordings from the previous episodes.

Josie: Awesome, thank you. And how about you, Arianna?

Arianna: I enjoyed going through years and years of BCcampus adoption information and adding details and standardizing things. We have this giant adoption spreadsheet, and I started to add more information to it. I started this work off the side of my desk, sort of, in spring 2020 when things looked bleak, and I needed something to drown my attention in. Then I shared it out

with the team, and it helped several other people in the organization do work related to adoptions tracking and sharing and the new OER collection. Our colleague Lauri Aesoph ended up creating something called the Adoption Finder, which is a Google Sheet with this information in a much more condensed, usable way, that essentially helps people see what textbooks have been adopted for what courses throughout the province, what courses those … what courses can be transferred between those courses. So if you have an open textbook for one English course, what other English course can be used for it at a different institution? That kind of thing. So it's very validating to have something I started working on kind of for fun end up being helpful to others.

Josie: Yeah, for sure. That's all super valuable information and really helps people make connections between different subjects and different books and all of those sorts of things. Okay. Well, that's all of my questions.

Why Did You Apply to BCcampus?

Josie: Is there any last thoughts or anything else that anyone would like to share?

Arianna: I feel like we should do a plug for co-op or something. Or is this entire thing just a plug for co-op? Cause I don't know about you all, but I … When I applied for BCcampus from the Learning in Motion website at the University of Victoria, it was just kind of on a whim. I didn't fully understand the job based on the posting. And I had actually just lost out on a different position that I really wanted, so I was like, "Whatever. Apply to this place, who cares. I'll get rejected from them, too." *[Laughs]* And here I am! Three years later, still here. So it's just kind of funny how it all works out, huh? What about — What about your experience?

Harper: I'd say that, actually, this job was on the top of my list for things that I wanted to apply to as a co-op student. I think I applied to maybe four other positions: two of them in computer science and two of them in, like, humanities and fine arts. I knew I wasn't going to get the computer science ones, cause it's really hard to get your first computer science co-op. And then the other one I was interested in, but it was, like, events planning, and I wasn't super into events planning. But I saw this and was like, "They need someone who knows HTML, and I can just, like, work at a desk in my own home? This sounds great!" *[Laughs]*

Josie: Yeah, cause Harper started during the pandemic. And so work from home was a big thing. Yeah, for me, this job was at, like, the top of my list. I had just finished a work term — I was working on a history research project where we were doing kind of digital humanities type stuff. We were working on marking up historical documents with XML so that they could be processed. And so I was working kind of on that, and I had planned to go back and start taking courses again in September. And then this job kind of popped up, probably in my email. It was definitely through co-op, but I don't think I was looking at the time. But it was like, *I need this job, I need this job! [laughs]* And I applied right away and got it and ended up taking that semester off of school. So that's how I got this job. But like, for me, I was really looking into — really interested in careers around publishing and writing, and the job was kind of in line with that. So that's why I was really excited about it.

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Kaitlyn: I remember I was really lost at the time. I think it was the term when I just switched my majors. I had switched out of psych majors and added linguistics to it. And I was just really lost and quite confused about what I want to do for my life and my career. Almost like an entire existential crisis thing. And I think I just lost at a job at the time — or not a job, an interview — because I did not do enough research on what that corporation does. I should, but I looked at their website and it was really abstract. So I kind of understood what they do, but not really. And then, yeah. I just saw BCcampus on Learning in Motion and was like, "Huh. That logo looks familiar. Like, it looks like the logo on the top of my textbook that was free online." So yeah, I went and applied for it. And it said HTML and I just took that CSC 100 at UVic, some basic HTML stuff that was required for my psych major. And thankful for that I wanted to be a psych major at the time, so I had to take that course, even though I hated it. But yeah, it got me a job. *[Laughs]*

Josie: Cool. Yeah, it's great to hear your stories about the process of applying and the thoughts that were going through your head when you applied.

Other Co-op Work Terms

Josie: Did any of you do any other co-op terms?

Arianna: In the summer before I started at BCcampus, I did a co-op with a small publishing house called Ronsdale Press. So that's where I got some experience with XML — kind of like you, Josie. Yeah. I feel like I owe part of this job to that job.

Josie: For sure. It definitely would have made your résumé stand out. As one of the people who reviewed your résumé, I can say *[laughs]* that was likely a factor, for sure.

Arianna: Yeah.

Kaitlyn: Yeah, for me, in summer of 2020, I did a co-op term at the LTSI [Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation] office at UVic. And I don't quite exactly remember what LTSI stands for, but I believe it is Learning … Technology … Yeah, it was related to the learning technology centre. And at that time we were migrating from CourseSpaces to Brightspace. And my job was to make sure the course content migrated correctly and make sure it was accessible, in a way. But accessibility standards were not — far not as strict as the ones we use at BCcampus. And yeah, the skills I developed from BCcampus really helped at the time.

Value of Co-op

Josie: Anything else anyone wants to …?

Arianna: Is that enough of a plug for co-op?

Josie: Well, okay, final question, then, for everyone. What was the value of co-op for you?

Harper: I guess for me it was … It helped present, one: an opportunity that I probably wouldn't have considered before, because my background is just — fully just the arts. If I list off — If I think of all of the jobs that I've had, I've had, like, one service industry job that was, like, a "normal" job. And then I've done music for weddings, music for concerts, music for a variety of different plays. I've been a marionette performer and creator. I've done stilt-walking workshops *[laughter]* and stuff, that sort of thing. I've been a bird in a parade. And so, I guess I hadn't really considered this kind of, like, "office" kind of job. And so, for me, it was very much like — it presented me with the opportunity. And then also, you know, as co-op, it's like an experiential learning thing, and so it also allowed me to kind of get my foot in the door, like, presented as, like — a co-op student, as someone who is learning. And that's, like — my job is to learn on the job. And I don't think I would have even considered applying for this sort of job if I wasn't — like, if it wasn't through a co-op, if that makes sense.

Josie: Mhmm, for sure.

Kaitlyn: Yeah, for me it was a foot in the door in the career market and the real adult society as well. And especially at that stage, I was changing majors and kind of lost in my life, and having that co-op term really just made me think a lot about life and schools and existential crisis, so it really made me think a lot.

Arianna: If I can jump on the bandwagon of experiential learning. Yeah, there is something to be said for the difference between … Like, for me, with my first co-op job, working in a literary publishing house. Like, they taught us how to write query letters and stuff. And then I was reviewing people's query letters and looking at their manuscripts, like I did in class and in workshops: I reviewed lots of manuscripts. But when I held them in my hands and went, "Well, that's no good," and then I *[laughs]* got to write a note to my boss about why this is no good, and he'd be like, "Yeah. Seems no good. Send them a rejection letter." Like, I went through the whole process. And … having that in my hands was a lot different than just talking about "Here are things they *may* like about this letter or that letter." And then with BCcampus, my co-op job … Like Harper said, it was just an opportunity I never would have sought out, because I —frankly, I had never heard of BCcampus, ever. And secondly I had never heard of open education. And if it weren't a co-op job, I probably wouldn't have thought I was necessarily qualified or it was within my reach. So it lowers the barrier to entry a lot to say: This is specifically for students and people who have no idea what they are doing, to learn what they are doing, maybe.

Josie: For sure. Yeah, I think it does … Like, that framing of: The employer is *planning* to hire a student, they are *planning* to hire someone who is still learning, who has these skills to offer and also these areas — potential for growth. Having that expectation, which is kind of included in the co-op program, definitely helps make that kind of step toward a career within your area you want to work in a little bit more accessible, or a little bit more … less intimidating, maybe?

Harper: And even if … Even just, like, the mental barrier of, like, you knowing that they have that expectation of you as a student, as someone that will have to learn and will, like, you know, mess up and won't know what is going on. Because, like, especially with my kind of career/field in terms of … like, computer science is super competitive. It's very intimidating to kind of think about trying to go into that field as like a just-recent graduate. And so, like, having just even the

opportunity to be like, "Oh, yeah, I am a co-op student, learning," and that's like the expectation, will just, like, let you apply to the job itself.

Arianna: I think that was enough of a plug for co-op *[laughter]*.

Harper: Our team is just a walking plug for co-op.

Arianna: It literally is.

[Laughter]

[Instrumental music fades in.]

Conclusion

Josie: Thank you so much for tuning into this conversation! We hope you enjoyed. If you are looking stay up to date with everything that goes on at BCcampus, sign up for our newsletter at BCcampus.ca/subscribe. Thank you!

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