

# Online faculty experiences using open pedagogy to support social justice

**Melissa Ashman, BSc, MA, EdD**

Kwantlen Polytechnic University

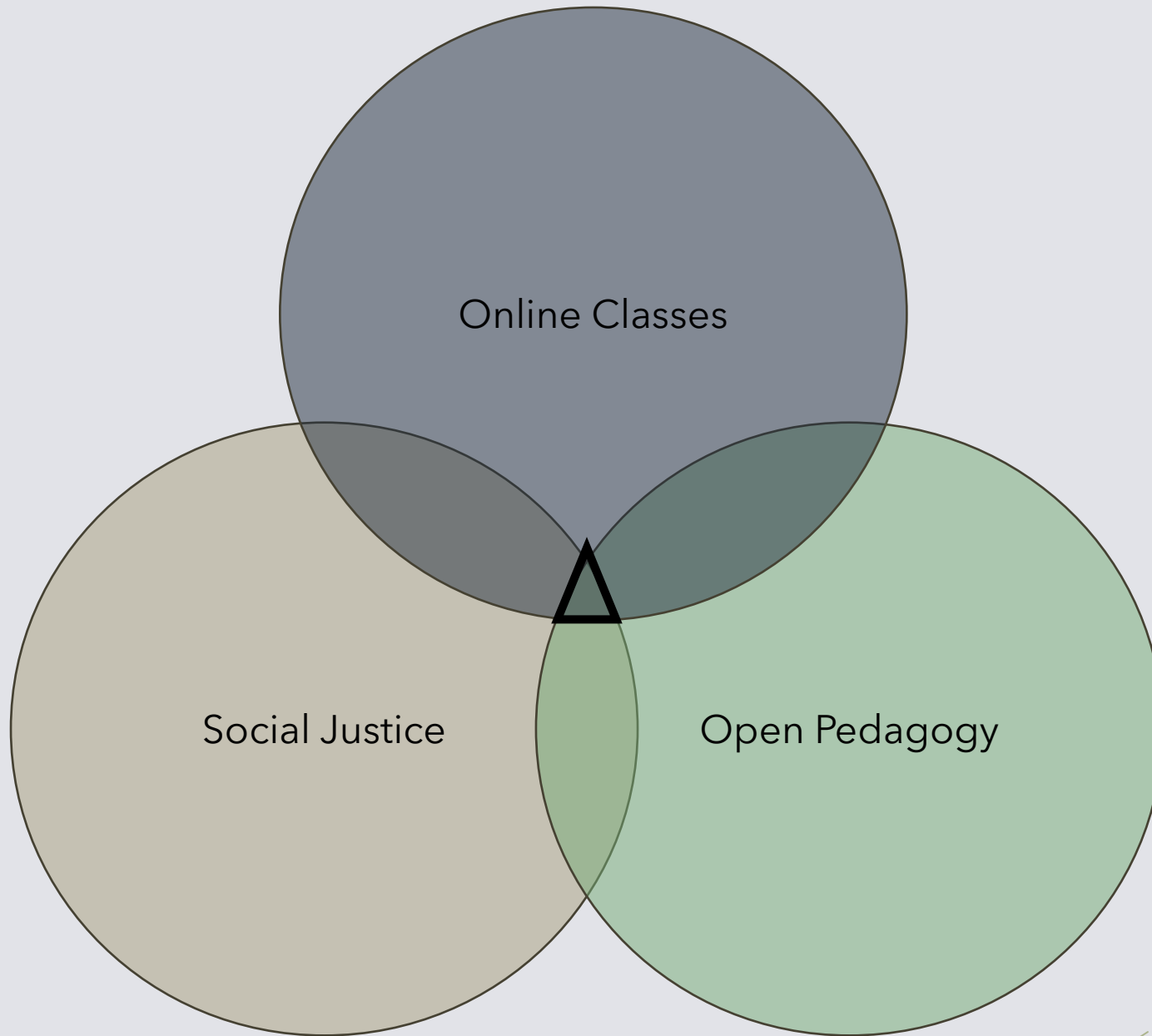
CIDER Session | March 3, 2026

# But first, a note of thanks

- + Supervisor: Dr. Connie Blomgren
- + Committee members: Dr. Rajiv Jhangiani & Dr. Pamela Walsh
- + External Examiners: Dr. Glenda Cox & Dr. Paul Prinsloo
- + My study participants
- + Global OER Graduate Network (GO-GN)
- + Athabasca University
- + Kwantlen Polytechnic University

# Land acknowledgement

PHOTO CREDIT: MELISSA ASHMAN



Online Classes

Social Justice

Open Pedagogy

# Background

- + Open education does not automatically support social justice (Clinton-Lisell et al., 2023; Iniesto & Bossu, 2023; Lambert, 2018; Mills et al., 2023; Raju et al., 2023)
- + Online learning can provide flexibility in learning (e.g., Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015; Chen et al., 2022; Kennette & Lin, 2021; Williams et al., 2023)
- + However, online environments can be sites of social injustice (Bakermans et al., 2022; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Cox et al., 2022; Croft & Brown, 2020; Ortega et al., 2018; Phirangee & Malec, 2017)
- + Using open pedagogy to support social justice requires instructor intentionality (Bali et al., 2020; Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Lambert, 2018)

# Research questions

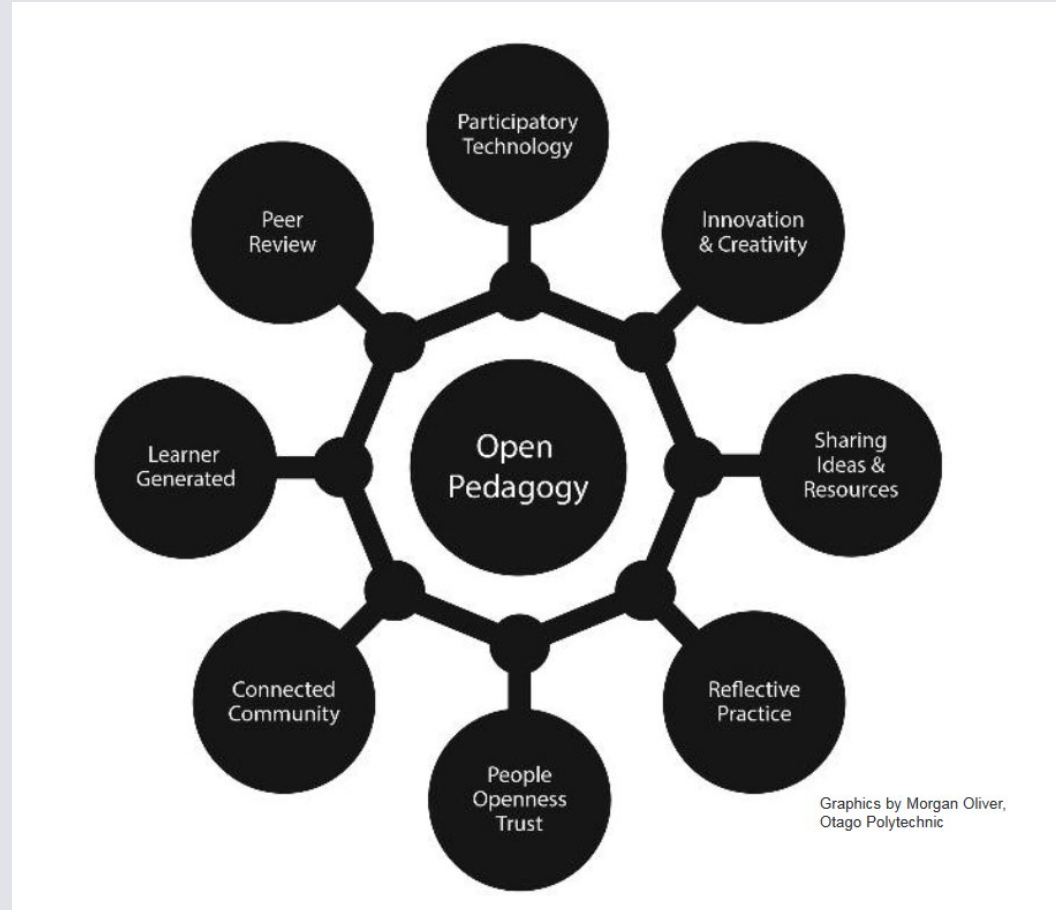
## **What are the experiences of faculty members who teach online using open pedagogy to support social justice?**

- + 1. How do faculty members who teach online courses *conceptualize* social justice?
- + 2. How do faculty members who teach online courses *operationalize* social justice by using open pedagogy?
- + 3. What *strategies and approaches* do faculty members who teach online courses and use open pedagogy to support social justice take to develop their *social justice leadership*?

# Definitions

+ Open pedagogy (Hegarty, 2015)

+ Social justice (Fraser, 1995, 2005)



Hegarty (2015)

# Research design

- + **Context:** Kwantlen Polytechnic University in British Columbia, Canada (my institution of employment)
- + **Sampling:** Purposive (Cohen et al., 2018)
- + **Recruitment:** 7 participants
- + **Method:** 2 rounds of semi-structured interviews

# Descriptions of the 7 participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Identities</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Teaching Duration</b>	<b>Online Modalities</b>	<b>Open Pedagogy Duration</b>
Daniel	Gay man	Permanent full-time	Several years	Synchronous	Several years
Deborah	Disabled queer woman	Permanent full-time	Many years	Synchronous & asynchronous	First semester
Helen	Woman	Permanent full-time	Few years	Hybrid & synchronous	First year
Kelly	Non-binary white person	Permanent full-time	Several years	Unclear	Several years
Laura	Japanese Canadian woman	Permanent full-time	Many years	Unclear	Few years
Mary	White woman	Permanent part-time	Several years	Hybrid & synchronous	Several years
Zahra	Visibly Muslim woman of colour	On contract	New	Synchronous	Since start of employment

# Summary of the results

## Research Question 1

How do faculty members who teach online courses conceptualize social justice?

### [GETs 1 - 3]

## Research Question 2

How do faculty members operationalize social justice by using open pedagogy?

[GETs 4 - 17] How Faculty Members Conceptualize Open Pedagogy

[GETs 18 - 20] Influences and Motivations for Faculty Members to Use Open Pedagogy in Support of Social Justice

[GETs 21 - 23] The Mechanisms of How Open Pedagogy Can Support Social Justice

[GETs 24 - 34] Planning Considerations When Using Open Pedagogy to Support Social Justice

## Research Question 3

What strategies and approaches do post-secondary faculty members who teach online courses and use open pedagogy to support social justice take to develop their social justice leadership?

[GETs 35 - 37] The Importance of Learning

[GETs 38 - 43] Engaging in Professional Development

[GETs 44 - 45] Advocating for Open Pedagogy and/or Social Justice

[GET 46] The Impact of the Interviewer and the Interview Experience

# RQ1: How do faculty members who teach online courses conceptualize social justice?

+ **GET 1:** Faculty members conceptualize social justice in a variety of ways.

"Part of it...is just **ensuring that students are able to express themselves the way they want without being afraid of being punished** or... having aspects of their identity weaponized against them." (Zahra)

"Justice is about fairness. It's about balance. It's about equity. It's about affirming difference... **[and we need to be] thinking about social, economic, and environmental justice.**" (Daniel)

+ **GET 2:** Faculty members focus on different aspects of social justice but broadly support many aspects.

"I think it's my responsibility to bring up those issues and **the same with Indigenous issues.**" (Deborah)

"I would say **anti-racism, intercultural communication, inclusion, [and] accessibility** ... are a huge part of what I'm teaching."  
(Laura)

+ **GET 3:** Supporting social justice is more than just open pedagogy.

## RQ2: How do faculty members operationalize social justice by using open pedagogy?

- + **GET 22:** Open pedagogy supports social justice by promoting inclusion of diverse voices, perspectives, experiences, and epistemic authorities.

“We had a textbook in that course, and so students pay \$100 for that, and we eliminated cost with creating this, which improves access. I feel that contributes to social justice... **The other part where maybe it can contribute to that social justice piece too [is it] allowed different voices, so students could bring their own voices to the material that they have created.**” (Mary)

- + **GET 21:** Open pedagogy supports social justice by enabling student agency and autonomy.

“That's something that I do try and encourage is that **students can show me what they know or show that they know how to do something in whatever way works well for them.**” (Kelly)

# RQ2: How do faculty members operationalize social justice by using open pedagogy?

+ **GET 5:** Open pedagogy changes the power dynamics between students and the instructor.

"It also changes the dynamic between the instructor and the students, so **it reduces that power dynamic of 'I am the source of knowledge, I'm the sage on the stage' or whatever nonsense that is, and it's more about 'let's facilitate your learning in a way that works for you,'** so I think that also supports social justice and equity and inclusion." (Kelly)

+ **GET 6:** Open pedagogy is a creative, non-normative, and innovative approach.

"Open pedagogy **can be very creative.**" (Zahra)

+ **GET 9:** Faculty members use open pedagogy in diverse ways in their online classes.

# RQ2: How do faculty members operationalize social justice by using open pedagogy?

+ **GET 33:** There is vulnerability and risk in using open pedagogy in support of social justice.

"I'm assertive and outspoken about things like open pedagogy or disability or queerness, or feminism... **I am outspoken and my fear is... that it's all rolled together in people's heads, and open pedagogy may get discounted if it's associated with me.**" (Deborah)

"I would say my gender being a woman and being a Muslim woman, visibly Muslim as well, and just like my racial background, I think these greatly contribute [to] how I am perceived... **I don't think within academia [that] the entire community is on board with open pedagogy... I sometimes feel that I always have to prove myself or prove that this is actually working, and the students are actually learning a lot...**" (Zahra)

"I don't know [why I'm not using the term social justice]. That's a great question. I have no idea. I'm suddenly aware... It's not intentional... **I wonder if it might be [risky]. It's not intentional, but maybe in a subconscious way [I'm] trying to use terms that are a bit more acceptable...** or have less like fight behind them." (Kelly)

+ **GET 20:** Faculty members view open education as a value, and this is reinforced via the positive experiences they and their students have when engaging in open pedagogy to support social justice.

## RQ2: How do faculty members operationalize social justice by using open pedagogy?

- + **GET 25:** Using open pedagogy in support of social justice is influenced by the modality, but the details are not always clear.
- + **GET 28:** Open pedagogy and social justice overlap, such that open pedagogy can be used in ways that do not support social justice.

**“You could be really prescriptive** and say person A, you are doing topic X or whatever it is, **but if you can actually be open and give people give [a] choice, that's embedding that idea of social justice throughout.**” (Kelly)

- + **GET 29:** Being intentional in using open pedagogy to support social justice does not necessarily translate to telling students directly and explicitly about doing so.

**“I don't think I use the words social justice, and I don't tell them open pedagogy. I haven't used that language... I think I need to like keep it really simple because I find most students, they're not familiar with the language... I could be more clear about using that language.”** (Laura)

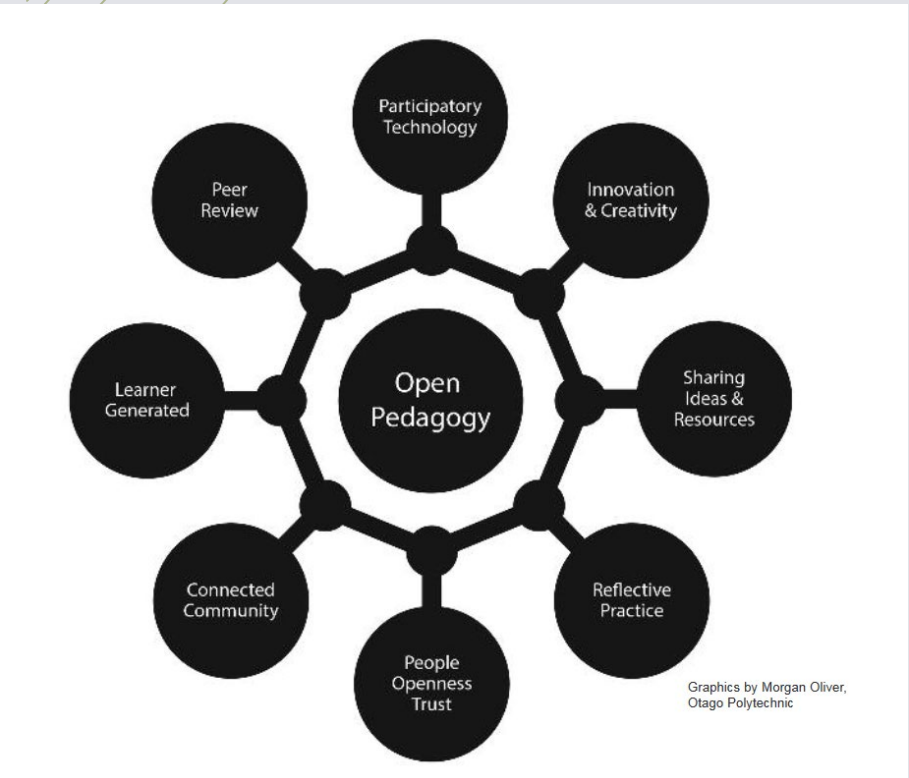
# Reflecting on the results to RQ1

*How do faculty members operationalize social justice by using open pedagogy?*

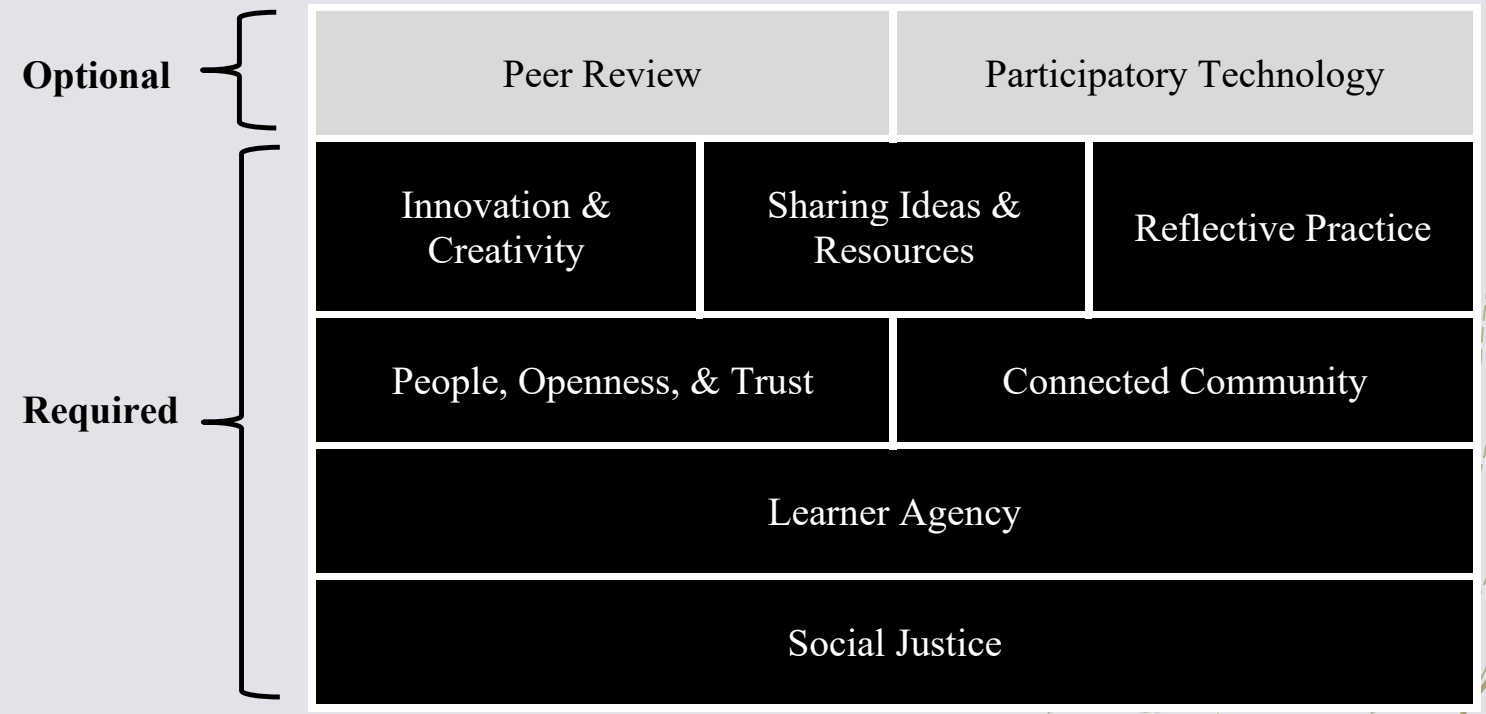
- + There wasn't a universal definition of social justice, but there were commonalities
- + Articulating how social justice was conceptualized wasn't straight-forward for all
- + Everybody was enthusiastic about their support of social justice
- + Some participants included more than identity in their conceptualization of social justice

# Reflecting on the results to RQ2

How do faculty members who teach online courses conceptualize social justice?



Hegarty (2015)



Ashman (2025)

# Limitations

- + Study design
- + My role as the interviewer
- + The changing geopolitical context

# Considerations & next steps

7

considerations for  
faculty members

10

considerations for  
the institution  
where the study  
took place

10

considerations for  
future research

## Download my dissertation

