

**Fostering openness within a higher education institution: tensions, opportunities and a  
work in progress**

Elizabeth Childs, Jo Axe, George Veletsianos, Keith Webster

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## **Fostering openness within a higher education institution: tensions, opportunities and a work in progress**

At our institution, the authors have engaged in open practices and have sought to promote a culture of openness. In this chapter, we discuss factors that we have identified as fostering a culture of openness at school, faculty, and university levels, and we investigate the tensions and challenges experienced in developing a culture of openness.

We approach openness as a dynamic and negotiated space which encompasses “collaborative practices [including]... the creation, use and reuse of OER, as well as pedagogical practices employing participatory technologies and social networks for interaction, peer-learning, knowledge creation and empowerment of learners” (Cronin, 2017, ¶ 10). Though openness is often assumed to be a democratizing approach to education, scholars have noted that its practice appears to be complicated and unequal (Gourlay, 2015; Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012). This chapter contributes to the conversation about what openness looks like in practice. We believe that openness in practice is much more complex than advocates note, and we anticipate that by sharing our experiences, other practitioners who are exploring open practices at their own institutions will benefit. This chapter is divided into four sections: context, factors contributing to a culture of openness, tensions and challenges encountered in enacting openness, and the conclusion.

### **Context**

Open practices are an emerging and sociocultural phenomena situated in particular environments. As a result, open practices are shaped by the environments in which they are enacted, while concomitantly shaping those environments (Knox, 2013; Veletsianos, 2015).

Therefore, this chapter situates its arguments in the context that framed our activities: the institution, the faculty, the school, and an MA degree within the school.

Royal Roads University (RRU) delivers predominantly graduate level programs to working professionals with an average age of 41 from a variety of sectors and geographic locations. Students bring a wealth of experience and connection to the world and their fields. After many years away from the formal education sector, many also have some trepidation about entering into an academic space as graduate learners, critical research consumers and creators. RRU degrees are delivered in blended format, with some programs being offered entirely online; and most programming is comprised of short on-campus residency experiences with the remainder of the degree being completed fully online using both asynchronous and synchronous approaches. Approximately 80% of courses are offered completely online, and at any given time about 65% of students are working in the online environment.

The university was established in June 1995. From its outset, it offered outcomes-based, blended and fully online programs that adopted a cohort model, placed team-based and applied learning as central to its educational approach, and used a learning management system (LMS) developed in-house. These approaches, while commonplace today, were viewed in 1995 with skepticism by some. As an institution that, for more than 20 years, has addressed challenges associated in widening access to non-traditional students, RRU has demonstrated a commitment to mediating the risks and building on the numerous affordances associated with using digital technologies in teaching and learning. From the earlier days using an in-house- created LMS, to its more recent designation as an Ashoka Change Maker campus (Royal Roads University 2017a, ¶ 1), RRU has developed a culture that encourages experimentation, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

A key component of this culture, and one of the distinguishing features of RRU, is its institutional learning, teaching and research model (LTRM). The LTRM (Royal Roads, 2017b) identifies key elements that are common to RRU's distinctive learning, teaching and research activities including: outcomes-based; technology-enhanced; experiential and authentic; learning community; team-based; integrative; action and applied research; supportive and flexible learning. The model aims to foster the adoption of high-impact practices across the institution and is employed in course design as well as in strategic and academic planning. Having an overarching signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) that spans the university's programs, and is taken up, in various degrees, by all units and aspects of the university, enables a variety of institutional stakeholders to work toward a common and shared goal.

Within this institutional context, the School of Education and Technology (hereafter the school), was launched in April 2013, with a mandate to offer related programming and pursue educational innovation. The opening of the school was itself a logical course of action for an institution of higher education with a unique provincial mandate to (1) offer certificate, diploma and degree applied and professional programming; (2) provide continuing education that is responsive to the needs of the local community; and (3) maintain teaching excellence and research that support the university's programs and are responsive to the needs of the labour market of the province of British Columbia (Royal Roads University Act, 1996).

In this context, the Master of Arts in Learning and Technology (MALAT) degree that is examined in this chapter is a variation of one of the earlier programs developed at RRU; it has been offered since 2000. The degree has been through several iterations since its inception and is currently offered in two formats: (1) fully online, and (2) blended, which has a two-week residency requirement including an online pre/post residency component; the remainder of the

degree is completed fully online. The students from each format come together in the third course to work through the rest of the program as a larger community. Courses in the program are nine weeks long and each program offering runs consecutively for two years. The program has three exit pathways: thesis (primary research), research paper (secondary research), and a digital learning research consulting project.

In 2014, feedback provided by external reviewers identified that the MALAT program was in need of significant curriculum renewal if it was to remain competitive and relevant to potential students and employers. The program learning outcomes and assessment criteria required revisions in order to align with the requirements of the field and realities of the work environment, expectations of employers, and the competencies in use by professional accreditation bodies. The course content required updating and the course design was in need of a complete reconceptualization in order to reflect current understandings of creating engaging digital learning environments. Through extensive consultation in 2015 with multiple stakeholders, the program was redesigned based on the cross-curricular themes of openness, networked learning, and the development of a digital mindset. The current MALAT program is now founded upon principles of networked learning and open pedagogy, where students “collaborate and contribute meaningfully to digital learning networks and communities in the field” and are equipped to “create digital learning environments, and apply theoretical and practical knowledge to critically analyze innovations and assess their impact on organizations and society” (Royal Roads, 2017c, ¶ 1). The program redesign was informed by the following design principles: (1) personalization of learning – choice for students; (2) openness and the use of open educational resources; (3) collaboration and contribution to digital learning networks(s) and community(ies) using Web 2.0/3.0 tools and strategies; (4) digital mindset; (5) networked

learning; (6) inquiry; (7) authentic learning and assessment; (8) inclusivity; (9) social justice; (10) contemporary, relevant learning outcomes; (11) academic rigor; (12) alignment with the school vision, and (13) alignment with the RRU learning, teaching and research model. These design principles emerged from a 2016 review of the research on open educational resources creation, adoption and use (Falconer, Littlejohn, McGill & Beetham, 2016; Judith & Bull, 2016; Kimmons, 2016; Wiley, 2014); open pedagogy (Cronin, 2017; DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2017; Ehlers, 2011; Wiley, 2017); the development of digital capabilities (Beetham, 2015; Conference Board of Canada, 2016), and design thinking and intentional mindset (Crichton & Carter, 2015; Stanford University Institute of Design, 2016). It was the intention that upon completion of the graduate program, students would be able to engage more confidently in public discourse in an informed manner and from a critical education perspective in order to lead and support their organizations as they continually improve the learning experiences they offer. A series of research studies investigate faculty and student perception of openness, identifying faculty and student support requirements as they work and learn in more open, public spaces.

### **Factors Contributing to a Culture of Openness**

In alignment with the RRU proclivity to adopt new approaches, tools, and techniques for the delivery of programs, the MALAT faculty began exploring openness as a design principle and considering the factors that would be critical to the success of a move towards openness. Openness as a design principle provided the lens through which all design decisions (for example: program, course, activities, assignments, readings, delivery, infrastructure, and interactions) were viewed. This ensured a consistent approach which allowed for more flexibility in the program design than if openness had been an “add on”. The process of this redesign prompted reflections on the institution’s culture of openness, the necessary levels of support for

the MALAT redesign, and the tensions and challenges faced along the way. The factors contributing to a culture of openness are examined below and, while they represent the authors' authentic experiences at a particular point in time and within a particular context as they *modelled the model* of a program designed around openness, networked learning, and digital mindset, we are cognizant that this is not an exhaustive list. While the literature may expand on these factors, we have chosen to focus and discuss the issues based on our lived experiences of the journey into openness in the MALAT program at RRU. We hope that by doing so, we provide an authentic picture of implementation that can be used by others facing similar situations.

### **Accurate Reading of the Institutional Culture to Identify Obstacles and Mediate Risk**

There are two aspects of this: (1) the school's ability to engage experts, both within the university and beyond; who would enthusiastically drive the design, development, and facilitation of courses, and (2) the ability and aptitude of the school to pursue this new direction and move ideas into action. These two considerations relied on the capability of the school to build on its existing strong working relationships with the Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies, as well as with other key university units and committees, including the Library and the Curriculum Committee. These relationships, together with the ability to connect with external experts familiar with the challenges associated with open practices, provided a strong foundation for the discussions that ensued regarding pursuing openness as a design principle for the MALAT program. Some of the ways in which the power of these relationships was manifest included working with external stakeholders to identify potential difficulties and collectively brainstorming strategies to work around them or plan for them. A specific example of this was the challenge of finding associate faculty (sessional instructors) who had a similar understanding

of the cross-curricular themes of openness, networked learning and digital mindset that were being taken up by the program; and who were willing and able to operate in this ambiguous, ill-structured space, while also designing courses that required them to operationalize this emerging definition.

### **Insightful and Supportive Leadership at Multiple Levels of the Organization**

Having the school positioned as an innovation hub at RRU allowed the conversations, with various levels of leadership, about openness and the MALAT redesign to be approached with a sense of experimentation and possibility. Working with a cross-unit leadership team was critical given the emergent nature of the definition of openness and the need for the design of this program to align with the institutional pedagogical model. In this process, faculty from the school collaborated with individuals from the following units: Vice-President Academic and Provost, Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies, the Library, and Information Technology (IT) services. By contextualizing the work of the MALAT redesign as a living example of a curricular innovation that was an alternative way of realizing the RRU teaching and learning model, the redesign team was able to demonstrate RRU's ability to continue to innovate in the area of digital learning. For example, the redesign was positioned as an opportunity to push the university to a different level of thinking, to explore new opportunities with regards to pedagogy, delivery, and the use of social media. The redesign elevated the need to be able to create learning environments that fostered the students' ability to become valued members of digital learning networks and communities in ways that extended beyond the traditional boundary of the institutional LMS. By having consultative relationships with key areas of leadership, the design team was able to illustrate the alignment of the redesign with achieving the goals of the LTRM, and in so doing, gain support and realize synergies. One example of this was



the ability to piggyback on a WordPress eportfolio pilot that was occurring through the Centre for Teaching and Education Technologies and IT Services. This enabled the transfer of courses that were traditionally housed in the institutional LMS to a WordPress environment, in addition to the creation of individual WordPress blog instances for program students. Extending the RRU learning environment beyond the boundary of the institutional LMS constituted a major shift for the institution and, at the time of writing, would still be considered a pilot of an alternative learning ecosystem for RRU.

### **Building Relationships with those who are Charged with Pursuing Openness**

A main factor that has contributed to the development of a more open culture at the institution has to do with the trust that was placed in the capabilities of those who were in charge of pursuing open practices programmatically. Openness is an emerging practice at the institution, and as we will describe below, there are numerous tensions and challenges associated with its pursuit. Nonetheless, when school faculty and the cross-unit redesign team saw pedagogical opportunities in open practices and alignment with the LTRM, it immediately became apparent that the relationships that had developed over the years between various stakeholders would be extended to this endeavour. In particular, team members who were less experienced in open practices valued, involved, and drew upon colleagues who were more experienced to lead and support them in these endeavours. Importantly, individuals who were part of the redesign team explicitly expressed their trust in the team and the process they were following; in this case, trust was defined as shared goals, shared focus, respect, and value alignment. The end result was to pursue this initiative knowing that it was supported, valued and respected.

One of ways this was achieved was by having a thoughtful plan and an organized approach to the redesign that aligned and was supported by the university's internal processes for

formalizing program development and ensuring quality assurance. With the support of the university executive, a redesign team participated in an intensive program planning workshop which resulted in the development of a clear vision and goals for the program. These goals directly aligned with the LTRM. The program vision and goals were then translated across the program learning outcomes, course goals, course learning outcomes, and aligned to course activities and assessments. Approaching the redesign systemically, the redesign team members then worked with members of their units to develop ways to achieve the program vision and goal. Drawing on, and valuing, the experiences of the different voices represented around the redesign table, as well as those external to it, allowed for a richer, more responsive program design to emerge. One of the ways in which this was achieved was by publicly sharing draft course design documents for feedback and input from the wider professional network through an open, comments-enabled Google document. This provided an opportunity for current faculty, associate faculty, alumni, external experts in the field, representatives from other disciplines and professions, and the general public to contribute their voices to the conversation. This act provided us with an early opportunity to test some of our own internal assumptions and beliefs about a more open approach to program design, and resulted in the development of community of support for this work within and beyond the institution.

### **Embracing Humility and Criticality**

Even though we saw pedagogical opportunities in an innovative approach to the redesign of MALAT, we were also cognizant of the fact that the history of pursuing pedagogical innovations and practices in education is fraught with tensions and challenges. Having an understanding of the history of educational technology, instructional design, and the pursuit of innovative practices in education ensured that we were approaching this endeavour without the

rose-coloured glasses that are emblematic of the Silicon Valley ideology to educational technology (Veletsianos & Moe, 2017; Watters, 2015). From an early stage, therefore, the school accepted the fact that there would be risks in pursuing openness and potential mistakes that would need to be rectified. In reflecting on these issues, we realized that a shared approach to our pedagogical endeavours embodied the idea of humility and criticality. Though we viewed the aim to re-imagine what a MA degree looks like with positive aspirations, we recognized that we could (a) learn a lot from others, and (b) not anticipate all outcomes and challenges. This recognition enabled us not only to support one another in these pursuits, but also to remain open to critical feedback from peers, administrators, and students. In going through this process, we realized that such feedback was consistent with our aspirations to “be more open,” and to adopt not just frameworks to make content and materials reusable and remixable but also to embrace an open mindset to our adoption of open practices. Throughout the process, therefore, we sought to maintain a critical perspective, not only towards the curriculum and the design but also toward the idea of openness itself and the feedback we were receiving from others. We believe that our worldviews of humility and criticality contributed to developing not simply a culture of openness, but also a broader culture within the school as exemplified by William Pinar’s (Kumashiro et al., 2005) contention that “we scholars must treat each other with the same pedagogical thoughtfulness and sensitivity with which we claim to treat students in our classrooms, and with which we ask our students (prospective and practicing teachers) to treat theirs” (p. 266). Critiquing the process used to enact openness, the outcomes of openness, as well as questioning openness itself, requires making caring and thoughtful reflections with an eye toward positive shared outcomes. Though we are only beginning to understand this shared quality at the time of writing, we recognize it in many of the interactions we had throughout the

design and development of the program, and we realize its central position in fostering a culture of openness.

### **Tensions and Challenges**

Of the many considerations associated with moving towards using openness as a design principle in the MA program, several areas of challenge – conceptual, practical and technical – were identified as we worked to develop a culture of openness. Examples of how these challenges are currently being navigated are discussed below.

#### **Conceptual Challenges**

**Lack of understanding of terms.** Early on in the development process, we identified a central challenge – a lack of understanding of terminology. Through a proliferation of terms associated with openness (e.g., open practices, open pedagogy, OER-enabled pedagogies, open access, and open science), lack of consensus in the literature (Wiley, 2017), confusion around the legal aspects of copyright vis-à-vis openness (Seaman & Seaman, 2017) and openwashing (Farrow, 2017), the average practitioner whose research is not in this area faces the daunting task of not only learning the language of open but also learning its associated nuances. In interacting with students, faculty, and administrators about our endeavours, we faced the three conceptual challenges discussed below.

There is a general lack of awareness of what the terms *open* means. When we in the school use the term *open*, we attach a specific meaning to it. When the term is used in day-to-day language outside of this community within our institution, we noticed that it was used to refer to one's willingness to be receptive and accessible to, or to be free, or offered at no cost. An example of this distinction could be an open course where debate is encouraged as opposed to an open course that allows individuals other than enrolled students to participate. In the context of

the MALAT redesign, this challenge surfaced as the proposal moved internally through the various committees and approval bodies. While no formal change management process was used during the redesign, this multiplicity of definitions for what counts as open required ongoing discussions with all members of the redesign team as well as the internal approval bodies in order to inform, educate, and refine the terminology around open in the RRU context, as well as how it was being adopted in the MALAT program.

**Open as a continuum.** The second conceptual challenge we faced was the tendency for individuals to view open as one state in a binary. Individuals perceived open and closed as two states, while we understood open and closed to represent a continuum of possibilities in which open and closed could be combined in myriad ways. Running in parallel was the tendency of learners, associate faculty and internal approval bodies to look to quantify open as a discrete thing with specific characteristics and applications. Moving to an understanding of a continuum of open (Kimmons, 2016) developed as we provided examples of course design decisions such as identifying the appropriateness of using the course WordPress blog and/or the Moodle discussion forums for various course activities, depending upon the perceived need for the product to be public or private.

**Varied perceptions of openness.** The varied understandings and differing perceptions of openness formed the third conceptual challenge. Though this challenge relates to the previous ones, we have categorized it separately to denote that even when individuals understood openness as a pedagogical practice, we encountered nuanced understanding of the term. Such nuanced perceptions of a shared goal posed challenges to developing a vision for an end-goal, but ultimately led to discussions that were necessary for the success of this endeavour. Working with our Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies, we spent time delineating the

various uses and types of understandings of open (for example, open access; open publishing; open scholarship; open educational resources; open pedagogy; open source) in order for the team to be able to make technical design decisions such as blog urls for the students in a way that was consistent with our intention for the program.

### **Practical Challenges**

**Risk of Reputation.** Venturing into openness has been identified as being a journey into risk (Falconer et. Al., 2016; Judith & Bull, 2016). As is often a concern for organizations when adopting a new direction, there is a risk of blemishing the existing reputation; in this instance, the risk was not solely carried at the school level, but also had the potential for university-wide implications. Along with the aim to have students working more ‘in the open’ on their course activities came the fear that the RRU brand would be diminished; if students’ work, with its potential imperfections, was on display, there was a possibility that there would be a negative impact on the university as a whole. To address this concern, work was done to re-examine the student Code of Conduct policy as the Social Media Consent policy was being developed in order to come to a clearer definition of student roles and responsibilities. This work resulted in changes to the course sign-on process, prompting students to formally accept these responsibilities.

**Potential for copyright violation of RRU library resources.** Another concern was the exposure of the university to copyright violation if students posted articles, in an open space, that they had downloaded through the university library database. In addition, there was a concern about student access to course readings if students and faculty were working in a non-password-protected environment. The topic of access to course readings arose due to the university process for confirming, prior to courses going live, that all links to readings and resources conformed to

copyright requirements. If the readings were no longer housed in a password protected environment, then it would be possible for faculty and/or students to post additional resources that violated copyright constraints. Due to the severity of the potential implication of copyright violation, namely having the database rescinded from the RRU library, various mitigating strategies were developed and implemented. These included email communication to students; synchronous discussions about the topic at three points prior to the first course of the program; discussions with faculty and associate faculty to raise awareness and share processes for follow up, and involving the library in the online orientation to specifically speak to this issue. While addressing challenges relating to risk and liability was essential, there were other practical challenges that also required attention.

**Resourcing.** Factors relating to resourcing were of particular concern; in this context, resourcing took the form of support for faculty developing and teaching courses, support for students working in the open environment, the implementation of resources for different modes of delivery, and securing the resources necessary to ensure timely implementation. Given the nature of the proposed changes to practice, it was critical to ensure adequate resources were in place. The Centre for Teaching and Educational Technology staff worked closely with the school faculty as they moved forward with course design and development, providing guidance and supporting the faculty who had limited experience working in open environments. Faculty who were used to creating learning environments behind the walls of the institutional LMS were now being asked to shift their practices in ways that many had not yet experienced. The work done by Paskevicius and Forssman (2017), as outlined Figure 1, proved useful as a way to orient and guide discussions with faculty to provide them with the supports they needed in order to create courses exhibiting greater degrees of openness. In a similar vein, students were being asked to

interact in a graduate setting in ways that many had not experienced before. Informed by the questions that were arising from faculty and students, the Centre for Teaching and Educational Technology staff developed documentation and resources to assist those using digital tools and working in more open, networked spaces.

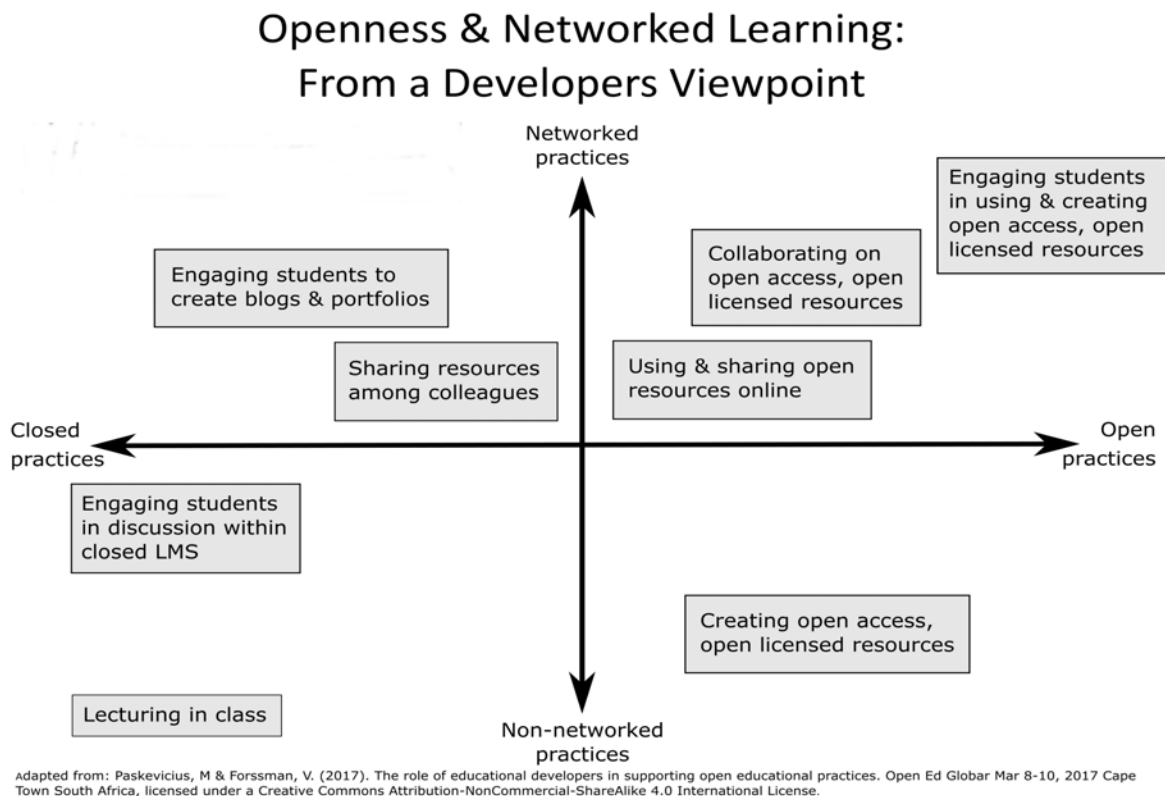


Figure 1: Openness and Networked Learning: From a Developers Viewpoint

When working in different delivery modes, concerns arose due to the need to house some resources and activities behind a password-protected wall within Moodle. In addition, institutional requirements to verify student access within the first seven days of the course required a Moodle timestamp. Therefore, the courses that were developed provided students with the ability to toggle back and forth between the open WordPress site and the closed Moodle



companion site; while not ideal, it did allow the option for providing activities and resources in both open and closed environments.

In order to address these practical challenges, the university committed additional resources to aid in the timely development of courses, including assigning additional staff dedicated to the WordPress site development, as well as to faculty and student support. Given the complexity of the new direction for course development and implementation, these working partnerships were essential to the successful program launch; therefore, obtaining sufficient resources to ensure the course development and implementation was mandatory.

### **Technical Challenges**

**The WordPress project.** In implementing this environment, the MALAT program had the advantage of a WordPress project coincidentally underway to provide an eportfolio platform to several interested programs at the university. In expanding this WordPress project to accommodate an open MALAT program, the Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies was able to provide instructional design and learning technologist assistance from staff with prior experience working with WordPress as an educational platform. Two MALAT WordPress instances, one for student sites, and one for course sites, were added to the official WordPress Project. The development and configuration of these WordPress instances was managed as a component of the larger project and, while the WordPress instances were kept relatively simple, full advantage was made of plugins and themes that enhanced their educational role. A key element of the design of this underlying platform was to keep as many options open as possible. For example, if an activity was too sensitive for discussion on the open Internet, then a forum within Moodle should still be a possibility. If an assigned project was mostly developed in the

open as a stand-alone website, there might still be need for a discreetly submitted document in Moodle.

**Learning Environment Integration.** Three key spaces on the web for each student (Moodle, the course WordPress site, and his/her own WordPress site) plus the possibility of spending time on other student sites, meant that it was important that instructor communications arrive in a consistent form, in all the appropriate places, and in a manner that was timely but also retrievable later. The solution was for all instructor announcements to be made as posts within an Instructor Announcements forum in Moodle. This forum was configured to deliver each post to students by email. It also generated an RSS (real simple syndication) feed of these posts. The RSS feed could be used to republish the instructor announcements on the course WordPress site (using the WordPress plugin FeedWordPress) and, via a widget, in the side-bar menu of each student blog. This setup coincidentally furthered the principle of open – instructor announcements would be on the open course WordPress site, and the university’s requirement to document the course – a record of instructor announcements – would persist on the course Moodle site. This was a critical requirement of the Office of the Registrar due to the RRU attendance policy.

As student use of the WordPress sites would mostly involve finding activities and resources on the course WordPress sites and creating materials, responses or engaging in discussion on the student blog sites, developing a way to connect these sites was important. There are typical methods of connecting these sites, such as lists of blog links and links back to course sites, but on the scale of a course with 30 students, how should a student or instructor efficiently navigate the emerging work and discussions occurring in so many places? RSS provided the bridge. Just as an RSS feed of instructor announcements could be used to re-publish

these announcements on the course WordPress sites, RSS feeds of the relevant blog posts on each student's WordPress site could be used to re-publish them on the course WordPress site. The end result was a category of posts on the course site that included all blog posts placed by students in a specific course-related category on their own sites.

A more efficient method of reading and keeping track of student posts, as well as the comments on those posts, was still needed. By using a feed reader, students and instructors could easily track the new posts and comments they had yet to read. Using a web-based feed reader allowed users to collect and manage the content of many blogs in one place. Adding the RSS feed for relevant blog posts for each student site, and the RSS feed for comments on blog posts for student sites to their feed reader, gave each student, as well as the instructor, a single place to keep track of course activity.

Finally, in order to make the extensive use of RSS feeds by the instructor, students and support staff easier and less prone to human error, we used OPML (outline processor mark-up language) files to add many RSS feeds at once. These OPML files are collections of RSS feeds, and tools that make use of them can simplify the task of syndicating many feeds at once. Using OPML files syndicating all student posts for a specific course, or syndicating all comments on student posts, a student or an instructor can create a collection of feeds in a feed reader in seconds. This also enabled support staff to use this same OPML file of student posts for a specific course to establish the republishing of student posts in the course WordPress site. A feature of MALAT learning environment that can also be seen as a learning and teaching challenge is that students are free to discover the work of their peers at random. In some instances discussion will emerge around one student post. With a feed reader syndicating comments from all student blogs, and presenting numbers of unread comments for each student

blog, the instructor and other students are able to find the place where discussion is emerging and join in. Given the importance of learning community in the RRU institutional learning, teaching and research model, this was a critical technical challenge that had to be addressed.

Figure 2 depicts the MALAT learning ecosystem that was the result of taking these design constraints and technical challenges and viewing them in light of what could be done in order to achieve the program design principles and realize the shared vision for the program.

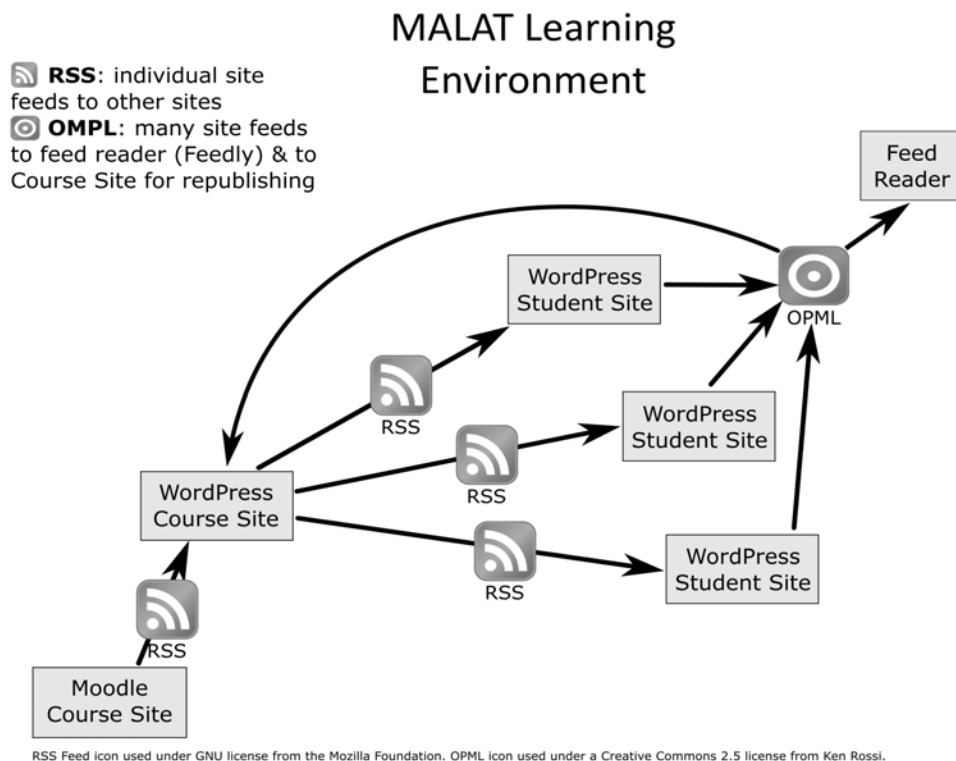


Figure 2: MALAT Learning Environment

**Privacy Issues.** One factor unique to British Columbia’s public post-secondary institutions is the FOIPPA legislation that governs the data privacy requirements for public institutions. This legislation requires that core web-based technologies used by students must reside on Canadian-based servers and that appropriate safeguards must protect students' personal

information on these systems. To this end, a privacy impact assessment, completed for the WordPress project, found few serious risks to student privacy, and there were reasonable mitigation strategies for those that were found.

The WordPress instances established by the university were hosted at WPcloud which houses servers nationally. This, accompanied by typical safeguards, ensured that the WordPress systems were FOIPPA compliant. Users of the RRU WordPress instances authenticated with their RRU usernames and passwords. The Shibboleth protocol allowed university users to access third-party hosted WordPress instances with their institutional identity while sending only minimal identity data to the WordPress host. The use of WordPress sites as a connected learning environment invited differing levels of public exposure. Students were informed of data exposure possibilities upon logging into the WordPress system. One enhancement to the student blog system for MALAT was the adoption of numbered URL extensions in place of the username URL extensions applied to regular university WordPress sites. This allowed students that wanted to be substantially anonymous on the web to be so, while exploring the level of exposure they would eventually find comfortable.

**Design assistance to leverage the Moodle/WordPress ecosystem.** The instructional design and technical challenges presented by the open MALAT program also offered an opportunity to develop a program-wide environment supporting learning that spanned traditional closed spaces and networked, connectivist spaces, where faculty and students mingled with outside experts and interested observers. The solution arrived upon was to use Moodle course sites as companion sites to WordPress-based courses and student WordPress blogs. This also presented the most flexible platform for as yet undiscovered learning design opportunities.

The desire to move towards open, along with the learning and technology content-orientation of the degree program, made WordPress an obvious choice. WordPress as a course site offered greater flexibility in displaying content and integrating outside resources, a place that easily included social media, simple re-publishing of content from student blogs and the course Moodle site, and a place for instructors to walk the talk of open. The design problem that then arose was “what should reside in Moodle, on the course WordPress site, and on student blogs?” Further, in what ways should these places be connected? By walking through existing course activities and assignments, and then examining activities and assignments proposed for the revised program design, a map of the relationships between the course Moodle and WordPress sites and the student blogs was developed and was used to guide these design decisions.

The companion Moodle site also played an institutional role. It continued to be the place where assignment grades were submitted, and where final grades were calculated before moving on for formal approval. Moodle was the location for the copyright review, and the location of the course outline information that would form the official record of the course required by the Registrars Office. In these ways the revised MALAT program was able to retain an institutional footprint consistent with other university programs.

### **Conclusion**

Embarking on the path of redesigning a graduate degree with cross-curricular themes of openness, networked learning and digital mindset has been rewarding and challenging. Institutionally, this work has raised awareness of the value and role of openness in cultivating innovative and responsive program design and delivery opportunities. It has demonstrated that there are a variety of ways in which learning environments can be designed that are consistent with the components of the institutional LTRM. It has also begun to cultivate a culture of

openness by bringing together units across the institution to work on a shared goal and then consider how they might take up openness in their own unit. It has sparked a longitudinal research study investigating faculty and student perceptions of openness. The initial data analysis and preliminary findings have been presented at provincial, national and international conferences and used to inform design and revision decisions, student and faculty support, and a human-centred approach to program delivery. However, as identified above, entering into openness is complicated, in part due to the complexities involved in designing for an ill-structured, iterative and evolving space that is contextually constrained.

We recommend that those considering an openness initiative attend to relationships – both internal and external to the context. Take time to find and engage enthusiastic internal and external supporters and champions, and build relationships with stakeholders. Identify and involve champions at all levels of the institution who: (1) have, and are able to support, a tolerance for calculated risk and ambiguity; (2) trust in the process and the shared goals that are cultivated when cross-unit teams work together towards a shared purpose, and (3) balance the pragmatics of the project with the requirement for thoughtful, caring and humble critical reflection. Foster an intentional mindset that is fuelled by curiosity and supported by nimble, lateral and connected thinking (Crichton & Carter, 2017). Ask for, and receive help when needed, and enter into the initiative with a fulsome understanding of research-informed lessons-learned that are relevant to your context.

The recommendations provided here are intended to help foster a culture of openness. They are a product of the lived experience of our journey on the continuum of openness. For those of you embarking on an openness initiative, we hope that these suggestions broaden your frame of reference of the possibilities and challenges, and provide you with a more holistic

portrayal of what is involved in cultivating a culture of openness at an institution with all of the complexities that are inherent in the act of implementation.



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