Text Transcript of Interview with Robin DeRosa
Recorded on February 19th, 2019
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00:00    **Robin**: I am Robin DeRosa, and I am the Director of the Open Learning and Teaching Collaborative at Plymouth State University, which is a public regional university in central New Hampshire. Basically the lab that we have here is a professional development community, more or less, and we're focused right now on what we call cluster pedagogy because our university is reorganizing itself into interdisciplinary clusters. [00:30] So the lab is tasked with supporting the pedagogical innovations that accompany our academic restructuring. So we particularly work in our lab on open education, interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and project-based learning. So I facilitate that work. And inside of our lab is also an interdisciplinary studies program that I've been the director of for several years and I've since passed off the directorship, but that's a customized major program that functions with kind of open pedagogy base to it. [01:07] Originally I was in English professor, but I've been doing this work now for the last four or five years.

01:15    **Interviewer 01**: Thanks, Robin. How did you begin incorporating open practices into your teaching?

01:22    **Robin**: Well, I think good news for anyone who's involved in professional development: it was one of those professional development workshops that sometimes gets a bad rap for not getting traction with faculty and not producing institutional change. But in my case an event like that really had a profound effect on me. It was a technology conference that was hosted by my system in New Hampshire, and I went to it and heard a keynote speaker, Cable Green, who's the Open Education Director at Creative Commons, and it was really - I can't remember when, it was not that long ago, maybe 2013/14 somewhere in there - and it was the first time that I'd heard about open licensing or Creative Commons. [02:12] And I have to say it was kind of an epiphany moment, you know, when Cable talked about how the open license worked. It was like doors just started blowing open in my brain about not only how to make my courses more sort of cost effective and accessible, but particularly, how to think about using the ethos of open and open resources to work in new ways with my students. [02:44] I didn't really know what I was headed for, but I knew there was some kind of a sea change happening there and I started my first open project pretty soon after

attending that professional development workshop.

02:57    **Interviewer 02**: Wonderful, thank you. How has the use of openly licensed materials in your classes transformed the way your students learn?

03:05    **Robin**: Really, it's kind of remarkable. I'd probably been teaching in Higher Ed for just about two decades before I started doing this work and I kind of thought that I was at the top of my game, meaning every semester I was one of those faculty members who changed my syllabi, of course, and was constantly updating things. [03:28] But I really didn't think there would be a lot of paradigm shifting in my work at that point. I kind of had things down and it was going well. And it's amazing how much working in these ways has really changed everything from the ground up. In particular, the first project that I worked on where students and I kind of rebuilt an open American anthology, [03:52] so it was literature from 1400 - 1800 and we decided to make a replacement anthology so that public domain literature would be freely available for students instead of making them purchase a commercial anthology for like a hundred bucks. [04:10] So we entered into that project primarily to save money and to get rid of the irony of paying all of this cash out for public domain literature. But what ended up happening is that my students got so invested in the building of the anthology. And they began putting in introductions, and maps, and illustrations, and footnotes, and videos, and annotations. [04:35] And the more the students built out that resource, the more amazed I became at their ability to truly contribute to the field and to the way the course would be taught next time. And in fact, every time the course has been taught since then, these original projects by students have been remixed and revised and improved by future cohorts of students. [05:02] And ultimately, that anthology's gone all over the world really, in different institutions and with different organizations improving and reusing it. So we've saved of course a ton of money for students globally, but beyond that, the sense that students were really contributing to the shape of knowledge in that field, even though they were introductory students to Early American Literature, was a real wake up call for me. [05:30] And the students were so engaged that I started doing similar projects where students were co-creating educational resources with me in a lot of classes. And I think the biggest shift there is this sense that students have a lot to offer and we don't need to delete out there work at the end of every semester and start fresh, we can really have them participating not just in occasional projects here and there that are "real" but really all of the work can be true scholarly work no matter what level they're at. And that really shifted almost everything about my teaching.

06:10    **Interviewer 01**: I think there are a lot of faculty who are going to be really excited about this when they hear this story. I think there are a lot of faculty who don't know about this yet. And when they do hear about it, they may be a little bit nervous about trying to get started. How would you recommend that instructors get started with open pedagogy in their own courses?

06:35    **Robin**: I think first of all, to think about just one step or one project is helpful. So for me it was that anthology project and now every time I teach a course almost everything is different. For many semesters we were just discovering the small things we could do inside of that one assignment. [07:00] So I would say paradigms can shift radically, but that doesn't mean your practice has to shift radically overnight. You can try a smaller bite. So looking at examples of open pedagogy oriented projects that other faculty have done can be helpful. But I think they main key is to try to boil it down and the two wings of open pedagogy that I keep coming back to are: access to knowledge and access to knowledge creation. [07:30] In terms of access to knowledge, can you find the ways that students are hitting barriers to learning in your classes? So that could be anything from whether the demographic that you work with wrestles with food insecurity or even homelessness or textbook costs or childcare or veterans' issues paying for college with the GI Bill. [08:06] Like all sorts of things where that once I started thinking about access to knowledge I started to consider that stuff related to academics, not just student life. So we started to make small changes inside of our programs to be a little bit more flexible and accommodating to students who were wrestling with issues. [08:26] One example is opening a food pantry right here in the academic department to reflect to students that we care about whether you can get to the table to learn and whether you've got all your needs met. [08:40] So access to knowledge is one part and the other is access to knowledge creation. Can you remove more of the hoop jumping from your classes and instead think about your students as true contributors to their scholarly and professional communities. And, of course, we've been doing that for so many years through things like high impact practice and applied learning and experiential learning and internships. [09:03] So we get it, it's not all about open or high tech, it's really about what are the ways that you can respect your students as participants in the scholarly project alongside you. Once you get those two concepts, access to knowledge and access to knowledge creation, as a foundation, you can start making small changes here and there to reflect that those are your commitments. [09:30] There are lots of

people, the Twitter community of course is very active, but in general most states and many universities have pretty active open communities. So finding particularly instructional designers and librarians who want to partner with you in trying something new I think can be a great support for faculty.

09:52 **Interviewer 02**: Wonderful, thank you so much. What resources would you recommend to faculty who are thinking about incorporating open practices into their teaching?

10:02 **Robin**: Well we used to get this question a lot. My colleague, Rajiv Jhangiani, and I who talk a lot about open pedagogy. We didn't feel like we had a really targeted place to tell people to look, there are so many wonderful things out there. But they're, of course, all over the place. If you're really interested, particularly in the pedagogical aspects of open, we created a site called the open pedagogy notebook, which is openpedagogy.org. [10:30] Really what that site is, there's a short introduction that Rajiv and I created about what is open pedagogy, which is just sort of framing ideas that we put out there for people's consideration. The site itself is just a place that people have contributed examples of assignments, or course hacks, or things that failed, or things that surprised them. It's a great resource for just browsing to kind of get a sense of what the possibilities are particularly across disciplines. [11:00] Somebody who teaches, for example, who does training for electricians at a community college is gonna be different than somebody who's teaching a humanities course in philosophy versus someone who's training nurses in an anatomy and physiology class. So you can browse according to projects and reflections that come from disciplines that are closer to your own fields. So I would suggest maybe starting with that. [11:30] And then there's no replacement for finding collaborators. And if they're not right there at your own institution, just remember that we do have, through technology, the ability to find collaborators who are at other institutions. And so, reach out to leaders that you know of, or to your librarians to find people who will mentor you or listen to your anxieties and ideas.

11:58 **Interviewer 01**: Thanks Robin, that sounds like great advice. But I think some faculty will hit obstacles when they begin with open practices. Do you have any thoughts about what obstacles they may encounter when they incorporate open practices into their curriculum?

12:19 **Robin**: For sure, and I think I would start by saying remember that students are your partners in identifying obstacles and finding solutions to them. As

a faculty member, it's really not your responsibility to fix everything. It's partially your responsibility to make sure students understand the risks inherent in working in open and public ways. And then you and the students can help each other navigate those risks. [12:51] One thing I usually start by saying is that we want to remember that at the core of thinking about access to knowledge creation is the idea of student and learner agency. We want students, particularly when they're using technology or engage on the web, to have an understanding of privacy, and their entitlements to privacy, and to some of the ways that the web can challenge your autonomy and your ability to maintain your privacy in everything from data mining through commercial platforms to harassment and trolling. [13:30] I guess I usually remind faculty members that students who don't want to work in open ways are actually exercising a really important kind of agency that's central to the core of open. So that open and privacy are compatible and not opposites. [13:50] But I also remind faculty that it's not really about things like "My students need a blog. Everybody needs to be blogging. Why? Because blogging is the new thing!" Instead it's really about asking in this field with this particular student, how can open practices move them towards their own learning goals. [14:12] And once you identify that, you talk about the risk and then make a plan for that student, and the students can do that on their own. But that takes time. So first, consider your own practices. Do you share your own research? Do you share your own syllabi? Are you engaged with collaborators online? If the answer to all of those things is "No," you might want to spend a semester or two exploring open in your own work so you can learn better what the risks and potential is before you bring your students into that world. [14:48] There's no rush, it's really just about exciting them about the possibility of making more connections between their own work and the world beyond the classroom.

15:03    **Interview 02**: This has been so wonderful and enlightening! Thank you so much for sharing with us this morning. Before we let you go, are there any last things you might want to share with us, something we haven't quite asked you or touched on yet?

15:19    **Robin**: I guess the main thing is that I think of open as being very collaborative and dialogic. It's not so much a broadcast mentality, but an interactive and collaborative mentality. So if people are interested in this stuff, I just really encourage them to find the channels that work best for them. Reach out to me. If I can't help you with a problem, I can usually point you towards people who are working on just what you're working on.

[15:49] Even if it's intimidating, don't hesitate to ask for what you need. It's part of the ethos of the community, I think, that we will help new folks come into the conversation and also that we believe that an inclusive approach to open is really important. So the more new voices and different voices we can involve, the stronger we will be. [16:13] So I invite people to find me and let me know how I can help.