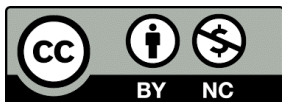




Kate Molloy

Degrowth in Postdigital Learning Design



This **three-hour course** is aimed at **learning designers** and other higher education professionals who regularly work with educational technology or support others to do so. The course will introduce the concept of **degrowth** in postdigital learning design, exploring better options for more convivial, sustainable learning experiences.

In each of the sections below, there are readings and multimedia content, and each section has reflective activities to work through as you explore degrowth. You might consider how the questions apply in your own context, or more widely. It could also be worthwhile to pair up as you complete the course to discuss some of the more reflective elements.

The course was created by [Kate Molloy](#), a part-time student in the MSc in Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh for the Digital Futures course. Kate has nearly twenty years of experience working in education and has spent eight years working to support digital teaching and learning in higher education.

Course image "Tech that Grows" by Dheeraj Nanduri for [ArtistsForClimate.org](#). Licensed under Creative Commons-Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0

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Glossary of Terms



Introduction to Degrowth



Too Much Tech



Applying Degrowth Principles



Designing for Care and Openness



Acknowledgements, Resources, and References

Glossary of Terms



Kate Molloy

There are likely some terms throughout the course that are new to you, or contextual within the course. Please find some of the terminology explained in a bit more depth below to help you get started.

Degrowth

Degrowth is a social and economic movement that challenges our capitalist society. In relation to educational technology, it motivates us to rethink our practices to achieve a collective good. Digital degrowth in education proposes more convivial, sustainable, and

Learning designer

For the purposes of this course, the title 'learning designer' is broad and encompasses those that work in the third space supporting digital teaching and learning like instructional designers, learning designers, learning technologists, academic developers, librarians etc.

Techno-solutionism

Evgeny

Morozov defines **technosoluti
onism** as "recasting all complex
social situations either as neat
problems with definite,
computable solutions or as
transparent and self-evident
processes that can be easily
optimized – if only the right
algorithms are in place" (2013,

OEP

"Open educational practices (OEP)
is a broad descriptor of practices
that include the creation, use, and
reuse of open educational
resources (OER) as well as open
pedagogies and open sharing of
teaching practices" (Cronin, 2017,
pp. 1).

Introduction to Degrowth



Kate Molloy

“ Schools or universities rarely talk explicitly and openly about the difficulty of knowing about the massive scale of challenges facing the planet today.

(Macgilchrist, 2021, np.)

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This section should take approximately 40 minutes to complete.

As learning designers, so much of our work evolves around the use and adoption of educational technology. Technology is often noted as a quick solution to large-scale problems that we face in 2023 – access, inclusion, engagement, and climate change. By implementing technological solutions, we can address these problems on a surface

level. We can, on paper, include more students and reduce travel to campus, but at what other cost? Do we take a moment to reflect on the deeper implications of the tools we use every day? Importantly, how will our current practices affect our future?

Across the education sector, technological adoption and innovation is lauded, yet there is often little focus on how such progress similarly undermines sustainability efforts. In the 2021 paper, "Rewilding Technology", Felicitas Macgilchrist notes that schools and universities rarely address the serious global challenges that we collectively face, but students are "already acting on this difficult knowledge" (np). As learning designers, it's important to research some of the more complicated and unpleasant underpinnings of educational technology, and consider how we might adopt our own practice in challenging times. We should also consider how technology *can* be used for good, and help to shape a more convivial future.

Sociologist [Ruha Benjamin's October 2023 TED Women talk](#) explores how technology might shape our digital futures. She highlights ways in which technology might improve social justice and basic human rights, as opposed to the common utopian and dystopian tropes that dominate futures discourse.

Sorry: we can't play video on this browser. Please make sure it's up to date and that Flash 11.1 or higher is installed. [Load this talk on ted.com](#)



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In her talk, Dr Benjamin discusses technological innovation, and most importantly, who controls it. She laments that this innovation-forward mindset doesn't extend to basic human rights and needs, such as health care. She calls for a collective focus on good - moving away from the dystopian/utopian binaries in futures thinking toward Margaret Atwood's concept of 'ustopia'. This vision calls for a refocus of our collective energy, reclaiming the future from technological innovators and revising it to

As learning designers, we encounter a lot of 'noise' on a daily basis. Our feeds are often clogged with new innovations, hype, and advice that often makes grand claims to transform our future-proof our practice. It can be difficult to critically sift through it all and determine what is actually useful when our work is so varied and often so busy. It's important to make time to reflect on the bigger picture - are we using technology well? Are we using too much technology? Are

achieve a more sustainable, social-justice
focused future.

our practices good for our students and staff?
The environment? Our future?

Consider your own practice for a few minutes, can you think of any instances where you have considered the following questions? Take 10-15 minutes to jot some reflections down.

☐

Have I thoroughly researched the technologies that I'm using and advising others to use? Do I know the corporate structure, data policies, environmental impact, and overall impact on our users?

☐

Have I carefully considered how much technology I am currently using? Is all of it necessary? Is there scope to implement local solutions rather than using expensive, cloud-supported tools? Is all of it truly beneficial for teaching and learning?

☐

How will my current practices influence future learning design work? Am I modelling criticality and careful consideration, or technological abundance?

Activity: Share some of your thoughts on the Padlet below. It will be helpful for all participants to read about our collective experiences.

Are you surprised by any of your reflections? Consider for a moment how you might adapt your practice. In the rest of this course, we will cover a variety of themes that can help you adapt and change. In this section, we'll cover degrowth.



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Degrowth can help you improve your practice

Degrowth is a social and economic movement that challenges our capitalist society. In relation to educational technology, it motivates us to rethink our practices to achieve a collective good. Digital degrowth in education proposes more convivial, sustainable, and ultimately hopeful applications of ed tech in the future (Facer and Selwyn. 2021; Macgilchrist et al. 2023).

Neil Selwyn, Professor of Education at Monash University, is one of the prominent researchers in this area. He proposes that degrowth calls for “a radical rethinking of how communities choose to do things, as well as the resources they draw upon in order to do these things” (Selwyn. 2023. pp. 4). In this approach, our networks and communities – our teams at work, our professional organisation, licensing bodies, etc. would be advised to develop a radical shift in our practice, and the development of a collective approach to learning design.

Going forward, learning design approaches in the postdigital age could be formed upon a “progressive reorientation” of common ed tech practices to implement degrowth principles (Selwyn. 2023. pp. 4). So, within our communities, how might learning designers reorient their practice, and what might that look like? How we can rehumanise our relationship with educational technology? Here are some quick tips:

☐

Consider locally designed, hosted or supported options.

☐

Embrace open tools, technologies, and practices.

☐

Thoroughly examine the ethical trappings and data privacy/usage statement of the tools you are currently using.

☐

Consider your students - are evaluations, surveys, or focus groups taking place to hear from students directly?

☐

Research the environmental impact of the tools or practices you adopt.

CONTINUE

Too Much Tech



Kate Molloy

“ The rapid adoption of ed-tech deepened the education sector’s reliance on private providers of technology whose growing influence was undermining education as an inclusive and equitably distributed public good.

(Rivas, 2021, pp. 280)

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This section should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

The 2023 book, [*An Ed Tech Tragedy?*](#), examines some of the more sinister consequences of the proliferation of educational technology, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. With learning becoming so dependent on technology, consider the

associated risks and harms coincide. We have become reliant on private providers to facilitate learning; providers who substantially influence the ways in which our students learn. We are reliant on platforms that we have little control over, platforms that retain and use data, include biases, and profit those in power. There is an ever-increasing moral obligation for learning designers to provide informed guidance on the tools used in practice, and to lead the charge for better solutions.

In the video below, University of Edinburgh students and staff talk about the concept of too much tech in the university experience as part of the [Near Future Teaching Project](#). Take a minute to reflect on their experiences. Can you relate to any of these scenarios? Is there anything that resonates with your experience?





This video from the University of Edinburgh's Near Futures Teaching project is licensed [CC-BY](#).



Finding a better way

As learning designers, we can help others make better choices about the technology we use, and in an ideal world, shape future practice. However, we know that is a utopian vision for some. Many third space professionals are in precarious contracts, or struggling for a voice within university power structures and politics. We *can*, however, lead in smaller, iterative ways to lead more transformational change. Our research, reflections, and practical advice can help the staff and students we work with every day.

By drawing on what we do well, our limitations, and a willingness to broaden our perspectives, we can lead radical transformation within our institutions. By inviting others to become more critical in their use of educational technology, we can even improve the digital literacies of our staff and students. Consider the themes below and how you might effect change in your own practice.

| RESEARCH, CURIOSITY, AND SCHOLARSHIP | REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | PRACTICAL ADVICE |
|--|---------------------|------------------|
| <p>It is well-documented within the field that research and scholarship are necessary components of a learning designer's job, yet in practice, it can be very difficult to find the time or support to allocate to it. It is important to stay current and to read and discover voices and opinions from diverse perspectives. Consider how you currently consume your ed-tech news. Who do you follow? Is it providers and companies? Who are the thought leaders you listen to regularly? Do they have any hidden agendas? Are you following perspectives outside of the Global North? From women? From people of colour? How would opening up your network help your professional curiosity and inform your practice? Take some time to assess your news feed, inbox, and social media feeds. Follow scholars and researchers over thought leaders, and non-profits and community groups over private interests.</p> | | |

| RESEARCH, CURIOSITY, AND SCHOLARSHIP | REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | PRACTICAL ADVICE |
|---|---------------------|------------------|
| <p>How do you currently reflect on your practice? Do you have space to share your ideas within a community, be it work-based or wider afield? Do you use social spaces to hold conversations, debates, and reflect? Do you do this privately? Taking a moment away from your busy schedule can help you get some perspective. Consider getting away from all things digital and journalling, or taking a way to think about your day or a problem, and clear your head. Teasing out your thoughts, issues, and concerns with others will help you give better advice.</p> | | |

| RESEARCH, CURIOSITY, AND SCHOLARSHIP | REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | PRACTICAL ADVICE |
|--|---------------------|------------------|
| <p>Universities are complex ecosystems of people, practices, and technology. There are often necessary duplications, complex instructions for completing simple tasks, and characteristics that frustrate and alienate users. Working with educational technology often means we possess knowledge of how other systems integrate with our tools, and with experience, we can advise the staff and students we support to help simplify and humanise their interactions with technology. Consider how you might advise someone to simplify. Would you suggest using less technology, or more ethical technology? Would you promote open tools or resources instead of proprietary?</p> | | |

Activity: The staff and students in the video above clearly see an abundance of technology in university life as an issue, and even a hindrance. Consider your own context

and your unique knowledge of university practices How would you advise them, either individually or collectively?

We're going to use a reflective activity called "15% Solutions" to address these questions.

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15% Solutions to Technosolutionism

The "15% Solutions" activity was originally shared by [Liberating Structures](#) ([CC-BY-NC](#)) and it is usually used as a group activity for problem-solving.

In our case, we are going to use it for a quiet, reflective activity. Remember, educational technology can make a lot of promises, such as the radical transformation of our practice and grand claims of innovation and progress. **Evgeny**

Morozov defines **technosolutionism** as "recasting all complex social situations either as neat problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self-evident processes that can be easily optimized – if only the right algorithms are in place" (2013, pp. 5). Can the very human problems facing our university communities be solved with technology through this lens? Or is technology promising too much?

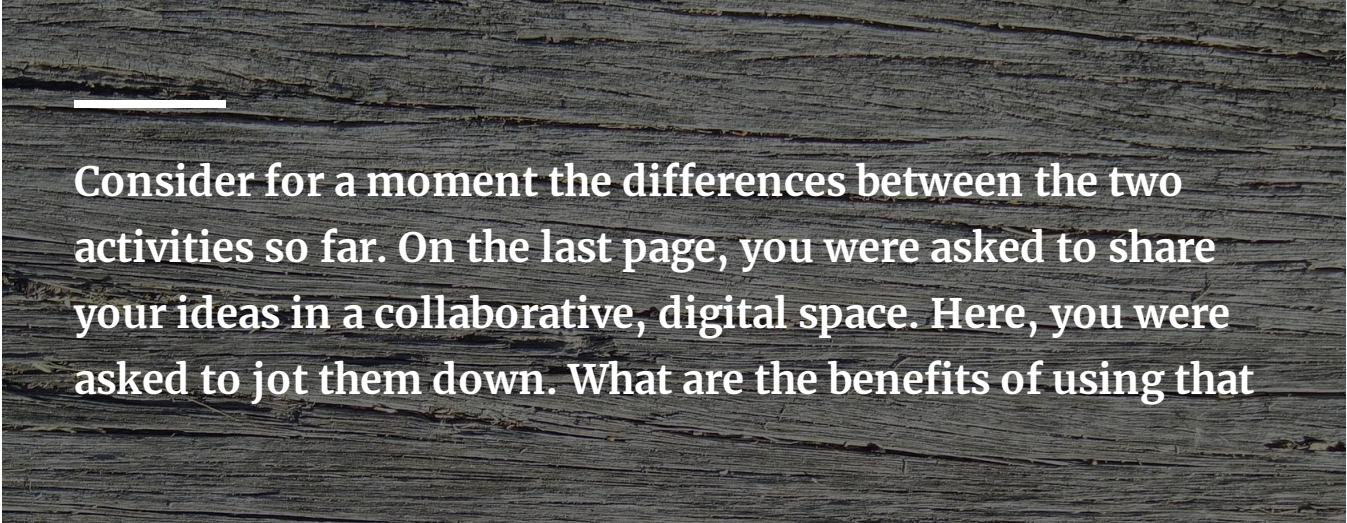
Take about **15 minutes** now to answer the questions below. Think about *your 15% solution* to the problem and jot your thoughts down on paper.

1

Where do you have **discretion and freedom** to act?

2

What can you do without more **resources or authority**?"



Consider for a moment the differences between the two activities so far. On the last page, you were asked to share your ideas in a collaborative, digital space. Here, you were asked to jot them down. What are the benefits of using that

platform that paper cannot achieve? Do the benefits outweigh any potential risks?

"* Wood Texture *" by pareerica is licensed under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

Reflecting on how and why we use technology in our personal and professional lives can help us to understand the role and impact of technology in our lives, be it positively or negatively.

It's important to remember that we have control over some of the technology we use in our lives, especially personally. We can also have influence in our schools and universities. You might consider participating in or even facilitating a **digital detox**.

Activity: Digital Detox

Consider how you might support academic staff or colleagues to reflect on their own use of technology. Are there practical activities that they could undertake to get started? One such example is the [Digital Detox initiative](#) led by the [Digital Learning and Inquiry \(DLINQ\) department](#) at Middlebury. A digital detox can help participants reflect on their use of technology both personally and professionally, and the participants in this particular detox receive two weekly emails in

Could you curate content from the DLINQ openly-licensed posts to use with staff, or perhaps create your own initiative for a more localised focus?

Activity: Skim through the [Digital Detox blog posts from DLINQ](#) for a few minutes and read through some that are of interest. Note the style and depth of the posts. Think about what you would share with your own colleagues to support a digital

January that provide resources related to each year's detox theme.

detox. Take some time to jot down ideas for your own scheduled posts/emails. How often would you share them? Would they take the same format, or would they be more bite-sized? What theme would you cover, or what tools?



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| CC-BY-SA 2.0 Digital Learning & Inquiry at Middlebury,

CONTINUE

Applying Degrowth Principles



Kate Molloy

“ Education should provide for limits, and not merely the kinds that curate knowledge or that lead to competition for scarcity. By such an ethic of limits, I mean that education—from classroom, to purpose, to student interaction, to the funds that support it, to whom it is for—should lead individuals and societies to living conscientiously in collaboration and creativity; education should also account for whole persons and communities, thus resisting individualism.

(Jones, 2020, pp. 19)

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This section will take approximately 70 minutes.

As we continue to explore degrowth and consider its practical applications, it's important to consider the values that underpin it and the good that *can* be created through the use of educational technology in the right applications. Technology can connect us, help to build and sustain communities, and facilitate creativity and collaboration.

As reflective practitioners, it's important to maintain a balanced perspective; and to consider how we might apply degrowth principles while also leveraging the very best of what technology can do to improve society and education.

In the Ted Talk below, [Amy Collier](#) builds on the drawbacks of technosolutionism as a quick fix to educational problems, highlighting the possibilities of open, online learning. She draws on examples like the noted open course, [#DS106](#), to illustrate the possibilities of networked learning and community building. While this talk is now ten years old, the good practices that she shares are still relevant, especially in light of the global challenges we now face. You might consider the progress we have, or haven't made, in this time.



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The move to online learning during the pandemic exacerbated inequities, but Collier notes that open, online learning can improve access and equity. It can also help improve our teaching overall. In her examples, it is *how we practice* that improves teaching and learning. Our practices are centred on values, and in these examples, technology is used to humanise learning, and for societal good.

So, how can you adopt a values-centred approach in your practice? Consider how we design, how we adopt tools, and

how we interact with others. Take a moment to reflect on the values outlined by both the Jones quote and Collier's Ted Talk. Can we design learning experiences that will inspire student to live "conscientiously in collaboration and creativity" (Jones, 2020, pp. 19).

Jones (2020) also outlines the following vectors of educational degrowth that will help you get started in exploring these values through a degrowth lens:

1

Simplicity

Simplicity does not mean doing less of your current practice, it suggests that we adopt a different mindset (Jones, 2020, pp. 11). Simplicity doesn't call for less technology, but rather a more considerate approach. How can the learning experiences that you design, or help others to design, be more meaningful? More human? Is there scope to spark joy, creativity, and care in these experiences? How will technology play a role?

Molloy and Thomson (2023) include a simple "Educators' Activity" for each section of their chapter on critical instructional design, "[Humanising Learning Design with Digital Pragmatism](#)" from the [Higher Education for Good: Teaching and Learning Futures](#) collection. Take some time to jot down some of the technologies or practices you regularly use. What simple advice would you share with others for a more human, straightforward approach to learning?

Conviviality

Building on Ivan Illich's work, conviviality proposes that we pause the never-ending growth cycle in ed tech and commit to creativity, collaboration, and togetherness. (Jones, 2020, pp. 11). Macgilchrist et al (2020) outline a near future scenario for a student in 2020 supported by a system that values collective agency. You should take some time here to read **scenario three** (starting on pp. 82) in the [open access article](#) below.



Students and society in the 2020s. Three future histories of education and technology.pdf

1.5 MB



Is this scenario achievable in our current context? How can we adapt our practices to move towards a more convivial educational landscape?

Care

Care calls for us to focus on relationships and people rather than advancement and achievement. How can we design with care in mind? Are there simple solutions like using collaborative spaces that focus more on the user experience than fancy

interactions? Can we plan more lofty changes like ungrading, or adopting open educational practices?

Accumulation

Jones' final vector, the "ritual destruction of accumulation" calls for imposing limits on some aspects of our practice (2020, pp. 15). Consider how you might limit the seemingly-endless creation and curation of resources? Is your time better spent finding, evaluating, and adapting existing materials rather than constantly producing? What elements of our practice are extractive and who do they disadvantage?

Activity: Applying these Principles in Practice

[ALT's Framework for Ethical Learning Technology](#) provides some guidance for those working in educational technology based on four key themes: **awareness**, **professionalism**, **care and community**, and **values**. It builds on their professional accreditation, CMALT. Take a look at the advice posed in the framework and consider how it might help you design learning using Jones' four vectors.

Framework for Ethical Learning Technology (FELT)



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At this stage, you should take about **thirty minutes** to quickly work through the [accompanying self-assessment guide \(CC-BY-NC-SA\)](#) that ALT has produced. Don't overthink your answers, and don't worry about covering everything. Use this time to assess your current practice, and jot down some ideas for your development. This activity will take approximately **thirty minutes**.



FELT Reflective Self-Assessment 2021.docx
920.4 KB



Final Reflections




Consider what we have covered in this section, from Amy Collier's hopeful exploration of open, online learning for a more convivial world, Jones' vectors of degrowth, and finally, your own self-assessment using the FELT framework.

By this stage of the course, you have likely identified what you are already doing well, but also, how you hope to further develop your practice. Identify some quick fixes for immediate application, but also take some time to plan ahead. How will you achieve some of your loftier goals?

Consider your own networks and support systems. Can you achieve your goals with the help of others? Remember, the changes we make today will have a profound effect on our future.

The image to the left was created for the [twentieth anniversary of Creative Commons](#), and was inspired by a quote from Molly Van Houweling, former chair of CC's Board of Directors:



“Better sharing for a brighter future means that the world is wrapped in a living connective tissue of shared knowledge, culture, and insights that spread joy and alleviate suffering.”

Molly Van Houweling

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In the next section, we'll cover open educational practice in a bit more depth. Take a moment to for some reflections:

☐

How do you currently share knowledge or practice? Is it something you are entirely comfortable doing?

☐

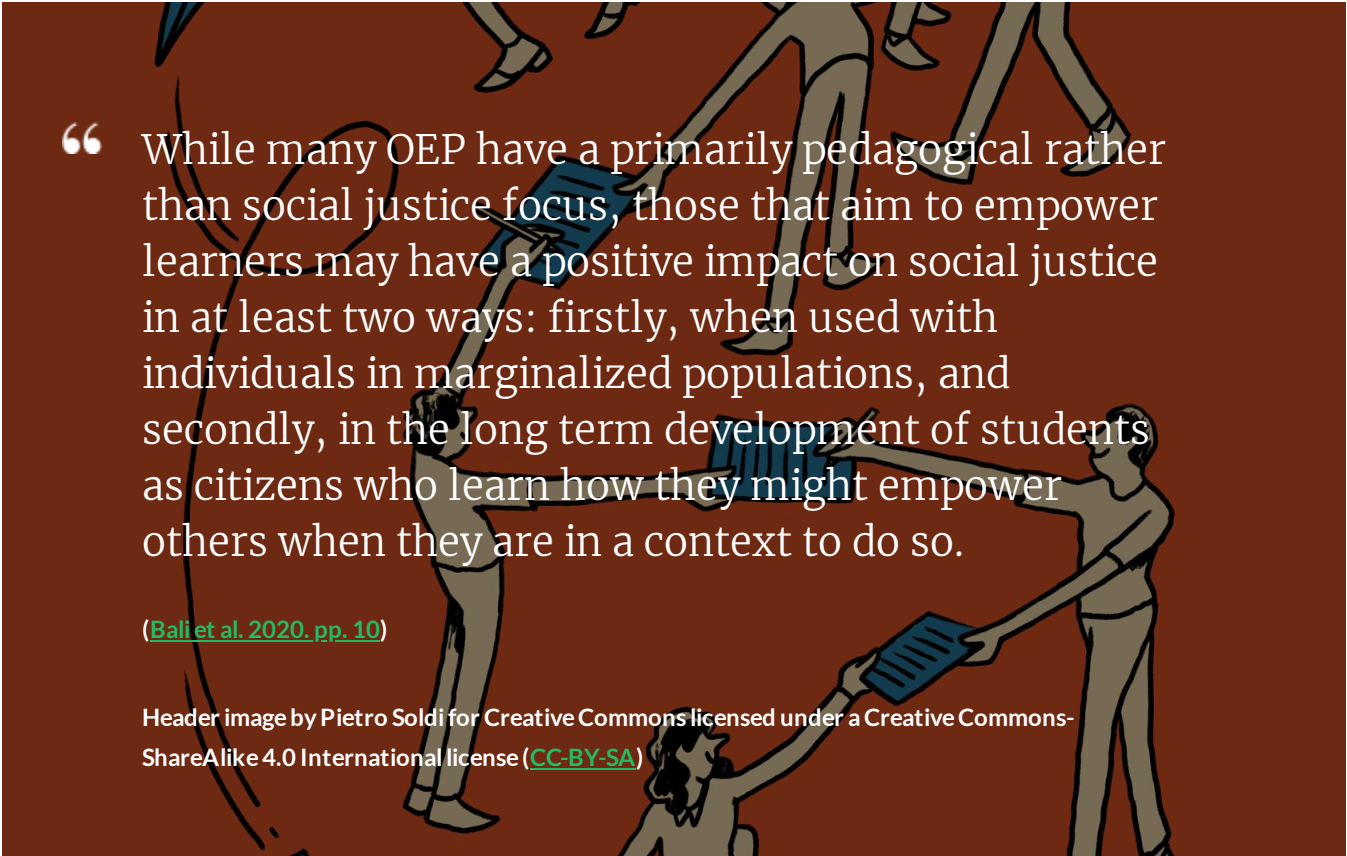
Identify some examples of shared practice or connected learning, either from this course or in your own practice.

CONTINUE

Designing for Care and Openness



Kate Molloy

A stylized illustration on a dark red background showing several figures in grey suits. They are in a line, each holding a blue folder or document and passing it to the next person. The figures are drawn in a simple, sketchy style. The text is overlaid on the left side of the illustration.

“ While many OEP have a primarily pedagogical rather than social justice focus, those that aim to empower learners may have a positive impact on social justice in at least two ways: firstly, when used with individuals in marginalized populations, and secondly, in the long term development of students as citizens who learn how they might empower others when they are in a context to do so.

([Bali et al. 2020, pp. 10](#))

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This section will take approximately 30 minutes.

Building on some of the concepts explored in the previous section, we will examine **open practice** and **care** as integral components of degrowth. While openness might not be a particularly new concept for many of you, it's important for us to apply it to degrowth in ed tech, considering it through a new, critical lens.

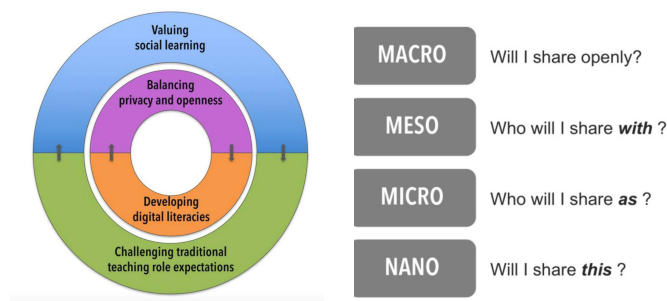
Consider the quote above, from this [open-access paper](#), the authors analyse how our use of OEP can impact social justice more broadly, while examining a variety of initiatives and practical examples. In short, modeling open practice in order to empower others.

As learning designers, we often find ourselves directly influencing, shaping, and impacting teaching and learning in our universities.

Even in small interactions, our influence can help to shape practice over time. By adopting OEP, and practicing with care in the open, we can empower the staff and students we work with every day.

In a 2017 [open-access paper](#), Catherine Cronin examines the use of OEP in higher education, in particular, the digital and pedagogical literacies of academic staff in relation to their adoption of OEP. (Cronin, 2017).

The two infographics from this paper highlight the nuances of adopting OEP in her study. Values, practices, and strategies emerged under four clear dimensions. Also, four levels of openness emerged, including the nano.



Four dimensions shared by educators using OEP (Cronin. 2017. pp.9)
This work is licensed under a [Creative](#)

Considering Openness at Four Levels (Cronin. 2017. pp.26)
This work is licensed under a [Creative](#)

Activity: Take a couple of minutes to think about your own relationship with open educational practices. Use the two infographics to help you consider your own values, strategies, comfort levels, and anything else you might think of in your reflections.

☐

What are you surprised by? Are you using OEP more or less than you thought?

☐

What values have emerged in your reflections? Do you apply these values across your digital design practice?

☐

Can you set some reasonable goals for adopting more convivial, open practices?

Let's take some time to apply those values to our use of ed tech, be it what we use, how we design, or what we suggest others use. Are your current practices creating convivial, open, caring learning experiences?





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Leveraging Openness and Care in Ed Tech Degrowth

This course has posed many questions, and required a lot of reflection on your practice. Be reassured, this was all intentional! Adopting degrowth in your design process isn't something that can be covered and achieved in one workshop or online course. The purpose of this course has been to inspire, question, and challenge you to consider your values and relate them to your practice.

Openness and care can help you apply technological degrowth. You might consider adopting open tools and technologies over proprietary or using and creating OER. You might challenge practices or tools that create barriers, and model good practice. You might consider using and sharing readings or resources that are open access only. You could join or initiate a network for sharing, be it in your institution or wider afield.

Care can be modelled through your adoption of OER and OEP, creating more inclusive digital spaces, or through simplifying our design process to improve the staff and student experience. Take a quick look at the image to the left. Can you help create learning that builds-in digital untethering? Collaboration? Play? Nature?

Activity: For our final activity, we are going to write some short "postcards to future learning designers" using the [Visual Thinkery Remixer Machine](#). What short piece of advice or hopes for the future would you send a learning designer?

You are free to jot down your ideas on paper, of course, but designing and publishing them using the Remixer will

automatically create them under a CC-BY-SA license, like the example below. Feel free to share links or images to your work in the Padlet below.



OEGlobal Postcard by [@visualthinkery](#) is licensed under [CC-BY-SA](#). Remix by Kate Molloy.



END

Acknowledgements, Resources, and References



Kate Molloy

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The illustrations used in this course were largely sourced from [TheGreats.co](https://thegreats.co), a project of [FineActs.co](https://fineacts.co). Art is curated on the platform based on its "socially engaged visual content open to anyone to use or adapt non-commercially". Please do visit the website and consider supporting these wonderful artists.

Resources

All of the resources included below are openly licensed and accessible:

- Flynn, S. et al. (2023). "Vibrant, open and accessible": Students' visions of higher education futures. In L. Czerniewicz & C. Cronin (Eds.), Higher Education for Good: Teaching and Learning Futures. <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0363.14>
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- Mathers, B. (no date) The Fabulous Remixer Machine by Visual thinkery, Visual Thinkery. Available at: <https://remixer.visualthinkery.com/> (Accessed: 25 November 2023).

- Molloy, K., & Thomson, C. (2022). Humanising Online Learning through the Lens of Engaged Pedagogy. In T. Jaffer, S. Govender & L. Czerniewicz (Eds.), Learning Design Voices. https://edtechbooks.org/ldvoices/engaged_pedagogy

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Please note that some of the references below are not openly available

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