



Ethical Educational Leadership: Author Interview

Transcript

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Narrator: Ethical Educational Leadership, author interview. Introduction.

00:00:08:28 - 00:00:11:06

Alana: Hi, I'm Dr. Alana Hoare.

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Alana: I'm an assistant teaching professor in the School of Education here at Thompson Rivers University, and I teach primarily in our Masters of Education program. So I've been in the School of Education for two years.

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Alana: But before that, I was working in the Provost office doing projects around institutional mission fulfillment. And some of that work involved our institutional priorities around open education and open pedagogical philosophy.

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Alana: I got really interested in what that meant for learners. When I became a prof, I wanted to carry that into my classrooms and I thought, how can I do that in a way that's authentic?

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Alana: Co-creating resources, building student agency, engaging students in the learning process in an active way rather than a passive way. And when the Open Press came out with some grant opportunities to engage students, I knew that was my opportunity too.

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Alana: So I was successful in getting a grant that helped me create a new course. I was very fortunate in my first year of teaching to have the opportunity to create a special topics course that fits my background.

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Alana: And working with Open Press, Dani Collins, Marie Bartlett, and Brenna Clarke Gray at the beginning, really gave me affirmation that that open pedagogical approach was something worth pursuing. And even though it seems scary for both myself and the students to give up that control and give the control to students, it was necessary.

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Alana: I was really excited to do that work in such a supported environment. And it's really sort of taken off. That's now a part of my signature pedagogical approach. It's a part of my identity. It's what I pursue in my teaching in all avenues. So the Open Press sort of gave me that jumping off point to do that work, and now it's really part of who I am as a professor in the School of Education.

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Narrator: How did the idea for this Open Educational Resource come about?

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Alana: Yeah, so it really stemmed from this blank slate. So my chair of my department said, you know, you really need to create something that represents who you are, so you can have that identity within the faculty and showcase your specialty in terms of leadership ethics, and I'll create a space for you to do that. And so when she said, you know, here's a blank slate, go create a special topics course.

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Alana: I had the opportunity to think meaningfully about how I wanted to do that right from the design of the course. So rather than thinking first of content, which would be leadership ethics, but thinking in terms of course design.

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Alana: And so open pedagogy was something that I hadn't had a lot of opportunities to explore. And this presented itself as a place to do that with the institution's focus on the development of the Open Press and the grant opportunities.

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Alana: And so I took it up. And working with those folks in the Open Press and others, around how to design a course and encouraging me to have that student centered focus. That's where that opportunity came together.

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Alana: So it wasn't really my idea necessarily. It was sort of, the ecosystem presented it for me. So knowing that TRU has that open pedagogical emphasis and that there's supports in place to do that work, certainly, I couldn't have done this without that philosophy being a part of who we are. Knowing that it's still growing and then having the opportunity to bring students on board.

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Alana: I have two graduate student research assistants that co-authored and co-designed the course with me. And where did the idea come from? Well, it also came from those two students. So when I brought them onto the project, I said, this is the idea I have in mind. I want to co-author a textbook and I want to co-create a course. Now, you have to come on board and help me do that.

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Alana: So it emerged through those conversations, through going to the literature, through talking with folks in the Open Press. Through thinking through what a graduate course could look like and how could we make it active rather than passive? How could we take something that's very theoretical like leadership ethics and make it much more practical? Ideas really came through those conversations and the environment.

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Narrator: What sources or inspirations shaped your work on this OER?

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Alana: The sources of inspiration really come from the university and who we are. I think our mission, when we think about open access and open educational philosophy, it just permeates who we are. And without that philosophy sort of woven throughout graduate studies, our mission and even curriculum design, while largely existing in Open Learning, we've seen this desire for that to spread across the institution.

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Alana: So I really think it comes from the environment that we're working in. Then without a doubt, it's champions. There are so many champions who are not only cheerleading and pushing this work forward, but they're also experts. We've got folks who are experts in these spaces, who can provide guidance for faculty like me who are interested in it, but not necessarily trained in this space.

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Alana: And while I've taken up the work and I'm learning and trying to become an expert in the area, I am by no means that. So being able to look to folks who have that expertise and to work with them with the students as well.

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Alana: And so often when I would work with Buki and Rumana, the two graduate co-authors and co-designers of the course, we could say, what kind of skills do you need to develop? Well, can I book you a meeting with Jessica to teach you how to use WordPress or, you know, Pressbooks, right?

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Alana: And so I don't have that skill set, but there's someone I can connect them with. And without a doubt, it was just the open arms and the, you know, attentiveness to those students and those students' asks that facilitated that work.

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Alana: I could not have done this alone. And, you know, interestingly, when I talk about the course design and giving up control and having students do the co-creation process, what's often lost is the competencies that students are developing through that process.

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Alana: It's very much an active learning, hands-on learning approach. But they have a lot of scholarly independence through that work. So while they're learning and they're struggling and they're making mistakes and building things, they're creating things that have lasting impact and they're learning as they go. So it's less about, well, the output is nice, of course, we produce something that's open and that other people can pick up.

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Alana: Interestingly, I was just looking at the statistics or the analytics for the textbook, and I think I have over 7,000 views. Like, the textbook has been picked up. It's gone global, and the students get to be a part of that. But they've also learned a lot of wonderful skills, and I'm trying to help them articulate those kinds of things.

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Alana: But when I watch Buki and Rumana, they pay those skills forward. They teach them to other students as well, and that's really the hope, that they've taken something from it that they can carry beyond.

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Narrator: How has working with the TRU open press supported or shaped this project?

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Alana: Oh, my gosh, I couldn't have done it without the TRU Open Press. No, absolutely not. Because like I said, I don't necessarily have the skill set with, you know, the technical skills or even, time is always an issue, right? And so it's like having a team to co-create, co-design a course, even in terms of, like, instructional design.

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Alana: So what makes sense when you're working with students and you're co-designing a course, how do you facilitate that learning? So they have agency and autonomy without feeling overwhelmed and being able to, you know, have conversations with Brian Lamb, for example, to say, is this, you know, am I putting too much on the students' plates?

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Alana: Am I asking too much of them? Am I giving up my own role as an instructor, right? Because some folks will ask that. Well, what's the point of you then if the students are doing all the work? And so it's really important to be intentional about, how am I facilitating the learning? How is it a collaborative process rather than one in which I've sort of stepped aside and let them potentially fail, which is not what I'm looking for.

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Alana: And so having folks with the Open Press who have that theoretical understanding of what it means to engage in this work and support students developing their agency and support students with understanding, curriculum design, pedagogical choices, and even being able to be explicit about those choices so that when students are in a class and they don't expect a teacher to give them so many leadership opportunities within and beyond the course, there's a way to describe that. To articulate that.

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Alana: Brenna and Marie and Brian are really helpful with that language in articulating how this is supporting their learning. And then, just on the groundwork, technical glitches, having copy editing support so that the final product is something we can be really proud of.

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Alana: And the students in the class, when they're writing textbooks, of course, there's always that insecurity about, okay, if I'm going to produce something that everyone's going to see, I want to make sure that it's high quality. They want to be proud of the work that they're doing.

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Alana: And many of the students that I get to work with, English is not their first language. Brilliant content creators. Really good intellect and competencies in many regards. But I don't want them to be fearful that what they write and what they produce is going to limit the knowledge that they share.

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Alana: And so having that copy editing support for us was really a way to ease some of those, I guess, tensions that the students were feeling. I could go on there so many ways which the Open Press supported us.

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Alana: I think one other important piece was the constant confirmation that this was important work. Right, of course, as an instructor, especially someone who's in my first year of teaching when I got the grant, it's easy to be insecure about the choices that you're making. And so to have, you know, experts saying, no, keep pushing, keep pursuing this, it's the right thing. That was really important for me.

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Narrator: How did collaborating with student research assistants impact this project?

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Alana: That was the best part. Without a doubt, that was the best part. I have, really, two brilliant, bright, energetic leaders who joined me on this project, Olubukola Bosede Osuntade and Rumana Patel.

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Alana: And they were able to take a student-centered lens to the work. And so if I would come in and say, what if we try this, they would often critique it, offer a different perspective, and say, I think you're asking too much of the students or, actually, students can do a bit more than you're expecting of them.

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Alana: And so having that insight into the student perspective was really helpful. But also, I could see how much they grew. Right? Because it was their first time really investigating ethical leadership through a multi paradigm approach.

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Alana: So we look at ethics through eight different lenses. And so they were deep in the literature, and they became experts in those theoretical lenses, which to me was really rewarding because I could see that the co-creative process was a high impact learning experience for them.

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Alana: I could see the change over two years and just how they took ownership of it, too. I mean, I see Buki walking around with the printed textbook. And she's like, look at this book that I authored. I love that for them. We were able to co-present at conferences. We co-authored a chapter in a book about women transforming leadership and higher education.

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Alana: I can just see how it will have a lasting impact. And Buki now works in all my relations research centers. So she's working with Knowledge Makers, and she's a research coordinator there. And so I see her reach extending beyond the Open Press.

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Alana: And, you know, she's encouraged other co-creators like Leticia, for example, who's done a fantastic job on Utamaduni Bora, which is also her OER, which she developed. So you see them being now champions of open education, and that's really validating for the work, too.

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Narrator: What challenges did you face during the development process, and how did you overcome them?

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Alana: I think the biggest challenge is time. I asked a lot of the team. So specifically with Buki and Rumana co-authoring the theoretical chapters. So the three of us divided up the eight lenses. So we each took on two to three chapters to write, and that's a lot to ask of busy students doing the work.

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Alana: And fortunately, we had, I think, eight months to write that textbook. I say, fortunately, but now that I think about it, that's actually pretty tremendous, to write a textbook in eight months.

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Alana: So fortunately we had support. From the Open Press to do that work. But we had tight deadlines, and I would say time was the biggest challenge. They were able to pick up the technical skills very quickly.

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Alana: They were really engaged in the project. In part, that was because they were compensated for that work. And so while they were co-authors, they were also research assistants and paid for their contributions, which is a really important part of this project. I think, something that we need to keep up, to recognize and acknowledge students' labor on the project.

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Alana: The other challenge I think was actually teaching the course and giving students that agency within the course. They were at the beginning, especially unsure of what was expected of them and unsure if they could actually do it.

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Alana: The culminating project was hosting an ethical dilemmas round table symposium. That was a really important part of the event. This open event where we have opportunities to bring people at TRU and beyond TRU together to discuss ethical dilemmas from multiple lenses, to really engage in conversations that can be quite polarizing. And to do that in a way that brings people together rather than divides them.

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Alana: That's a lot to ask of graduate students, to be able to facilitate what potentially could be very divisive conversations. I know they were hesitant about their ability to do that. But of course, over time, we can do things. And so it was lots of practice, lots of exposure to different dilemmas, lots of talking through those pieces, and then creating a community of scholars.

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Alana: So knowing that they're not alone in this work. I think that's an important part of the open pedagogical framework, that we're doing this together rather than on our own. And while they're developing scholarly independence, they're part of a community of scholars as well. I really leaned on Buki and Rumana to help with that.

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Alana: Buki ended up being a student in the course and Rumana was a teaching assistant, so they were actively engaged in that work. And I think that's also an important part of this work.

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Alana: Having student leaders in the class who can take on those leadership roles to model and to assure their peers that they have the ability to do it at whatever level they're showing up. So while there were some, I think, challenges, they're normal challenges that you would see when you're introducing, maybe, an unfamiliar pedagogical approach.

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Narrator: How do you see the role of open education evolving in the next few years?

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Alana: That's a good question. I think it's necessary. I see it evolving in our need to develop students' scholarly independency and agency with their work. When you think about how the world is changing so rapidly, we really need folks who have the ability to change with it.

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Alana: And rather than passively engaging in their education, I think students need to be able to take hold of it, to take some agency in that work and become leaders within the classroom. And produce work that doesn't get thrown away after it's created.

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Alana: I'm sure we're all familiar with writing an essay and then it going in the garbage after it's marked, right? Those kinds of disposable assignments or work that doesn't have relevance to a student's life, to anyone's life.

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Alana: We don't have time for that. Our world is too busy. The students that I get to teach, they have children. They have jobs. They have family emergencies. They're in a new culture, learning a new culture. They have many things that they're navigating, that they're balancing, and there's really no time for completing an assignment that has no value beyond the course.

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Alana: I think if we want to have meaningful education, then students need to be creating content while they're learning. So using those three hour lecture blocks to create something that has an impact on their communities, their families, and what better space than in a classroom where they're connected to the theory.

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Alana: They have facilitated conversations with local expertise, those scholars who have that theoretical expertise, I think we really need to find ways to make our learning environments more meaningful. Otherwise, students will not attend. They'll show up late.

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Alana: They won't do their assignments, right? So the assignment should have meaning. I think an open educational philosophy helps to address some of those challenges that we see with students passively engaging or students choosing not to engage at all. There's ways we can do this better, and I think this is one way to do that.

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Narrator: Thank you for the interview, Alana.