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## EDITORIAL

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## ABSTRACT

Why is Openness in Education important, and why is it critically needed at this moment? As manifested in our guiding question, the significance of Openness in Education and its immediate necessity form the heart of this collaborative editorial piece. This rather straightforward, yet nuanced query has sparked this collective endeavour by using individual testimonies, which may also be taken as living narratives, to reveal the value of Openness in Education as a praxis. Such testimonies serve as rich, personal narratives, critical introspections, and experience-based accounts that function as sources of data. The data gleaned from these narratives points to the understanding of Openness in Education as a complex, multilayered concept intricately woven into an array of values. These range from aspects such as sharing, access, flexibility, affordability, enlightenment, barrier-removal, empowerment, care, individual agency, trust, innovation, sustainability, collaboration, co-creation, social justice, equity, transparency, inclusivity, decolonization, democratisation, participation, liberty, and respect for diversity. This editorial, as a product of collective endeavour, invites its readers to independently engage with individual narratives, fostering the creation of unique interpretations. This call stems from the distinctive character of each narrative as they voice individual researchers' perspectives from around the globe, articulating their insights within their unique situational contexts.

## INTRODUCTION: ENVISIONING A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE IN THE ABSENCE OF OPEN ECOSYSTEMS

Consider for a moment the implications of a solitary existence devoid of openness – an isolated world where social relationships, human interaction and communication are anomalies, rather than the norm. Imagining such a bleak, antisocial future illuminates the profound significance of openness, revealing it to be a vital component in our survival toolkit as inherently social beings. While the value of openness in sustaining life is undeniable, its contributions extend far beyond mere survival. Openness serves as an indispensable ingredient in the rich recipe of human learning, development, and progress. It is a truth universally acknowledged that human beings naturally inhabit an open ecosystem, engaging in complex, multifaceted interactions with their environment. Hence, one can make a persuasive argument that openness acts as a potent catalyst, facilitating and invigorating the process of learning. Despite all these benefits of openness and its important role in the learning ecology, it should be noted that institutions create artificial boundaries and insert barriers that oppose and interrupt this openness. However, those of us who wrote this piece resist these artificial barriers and believe in the value of openness.

## VOICES FROM THE SCHOLARLY LANDSCAPES

The chorus of scholarly voices advocating the praxis of Openness in Education continues to grow (Cronin, 2017; Hodgkinson-Williams et al., 2017; Koçdar et al., 2023; Stracke et al., 2023a; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020), a noble purpose faithfully echoed by the long-established Journal of Open Praxis (Bozkurt & Gil-Jaurena, 2023) and many other journals in the field. Openness in Education is neither a stagnant nor a monolithic concept; it is a fluid, continually evolving ideal, moulded by shifting societal, cultural, geographical, and economic landscapes and, thus, it does not have a precise definition (Bozkurt et al., 2019). Its boundaries are expansive, spanning across myriad dimensions, levels, and layers (Bozkurt & Gil-Jaurena, 2023; Conrad & Prinsloo, 2020; Stracke, 2017; Weller et al., 2018), and encompassing a vast array of elements such as open learning (Mishra, 2012), open pedagogy (Casey et al., 2022), open educational resources (OER) (Bliss & Tuiloma, 2022; Mishra, 2017; Stracke et al., 2019), open educational practices (OEP) (Cronin et al., 2023; Ehlers, 2011; Koseoglu & Bozkurt, 2018; Koseoglu et al., 2020; Tlili et al., 2021), open scholarship (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012), open science (Stracke et al., 2022a) among others.

Indeed, openness is a living idea that incarnates in different forms based on emerging demands of its ecological surroundings (Bozkurt & Stracke, 2023; Stracke et al., 2023b). Supporting these views and highlighting its multifaceted nature, Baker (2017) contends that the task of pinning down a definitive description of openness is a challenging goal, given its fluid nature, loaded with attributes of “freedom, justice, respect, sharing, accessibility, transparency, collaboration, agency, self-direction, personalization, and ubiquitous ownership” (pp. 131–132). Zawacki-Richter et al. (2020) concur with this sentiment, recognizing ‘openness’ as a colour with many shades, intertwined with critical pedagogy, loaded with pluralistic and inclusive connotations, and dedicated to expanding participation. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2020) further argue that, over time, ‘openness’ has donned several guises. Yet, what it truly embodies is a living ideal, a beacon of inspiration for open education and for open learning ecosystems. As such, openness continues to evolve, absorbing and integrating an increasingly complex array of meanings.

In light of these vibrant debates around the form, scope, and definitions of ‘openness’, we propose a reframing of our understanding, underpinned by a critical, exploratory, and thought-provoking approach. We intend to document personal testimonies, leveraging them as invaluable resources to shed more light on the enigma that is Openness in Education.

## TESTIMONIES, AS PERSONAL NARRATIVES, CRITICAL REFLECTIONS AND EXPERIENTIAL ACCOUNTS

Openness in Education is a complex and ever-evolving field that fundamentally revolves around the liberation of people, knowledge, and learning. It emphasises sharing as the default mode of operation, with a focus on reciprocity, networking, honesty, and transparency. However, it is crucial to critically examine and provoke thoughts about the principles and values underlying open education.

Testimonies are used to transfer the knowledge and experiences we have gained throughout history from one generation to another, and are also frequently used to express our emotions and how we feel. Testimonies, as personal narratives, critical reflections, and experiential accounts, have become increasingly valued as a data collection tool in academic research. As researchers recognize the limitations of traditional quantitative methods in capturing the complexity of human experiences, they turn to testimonies to offer nuanced insights into individuals’ lived realities. In this regard, this editorial used testimonies to reveal a simple, yet critical question: Why is Openness in Education as a praxis important, and why is it critically needed at this moment?

## CONCLUSION: OPENNESS IN EDUCATION IS ALWAYS A BEGINNING AND A CONTINUOUS JOURNEY

The collective testimonies which will be presented in the following section indicate that Openness in Education is a multidimensional and multilayered concept deeply embedded in a diverse range of values, including sharing, access, flexibility, affordability, enlightenment, removing barriers, empowerment, caring, agency, trust, innovation, sustainability, collaboration, co-creation, social justice, equity, transparency, inclusivity, decolonization, democratisation, participation, liberty, and respect for diversity. Openness in Education can be viewed as a regulative ideal, a navigation tool, and a space for collaboration and discourse. It nurtures individual connections, international partnerships, knowledge exchange, and cross-cultural learning experiences, leading to a more interconnected and understanding society. From this perspective, it can be argued that it is a progressive movement towards a more equitable, accessible, and democratic global learning landscape.

Against all the values of Openness in Education, there still are some challenges that must be approached critically and navigated with care. The challenges for Openness in Education include the digital divide, quality assurance, intellectual property issues, commercialization, and institutional resistance. Addressing these challenges requires systemic changes at policy levels, collaboration and advocacy along with concerted efforts at the institutional and individual levels. The dialogue around these challenges underlines the need for critical engagement with the concept of open education – recognizing its potential, while also being aware of the complexities and contradictions that it presents. Ultimately, Openness in Education is not a destination but a continuous journey.

Although the points emphasised by the testimonies are briefly discussed above, the intention of this section is not merely to recount a recapitulation of the various testimonies presented. Rather, it is a prompt for the readers of this collective editorial to delve into each testimony individually, formulating their own interpretations: Readers are invited and encouraged to critically reflect and analyse how valuable the testimonies are for their perspectives and practices. It is important to understand that every testimony is distinctive in its nature, conveying the perspectives of individual researchers from around the world. They embody unique meanings that reflect their specific contexts. Thus, a critical and personal engagement with each is encouraged for a comprehensive understanding. As a final remark, since testimonies are presented after this point, it would perhaps be more accurate to characterise this section as a beginning rather than a conclusion.

## BEGINNING: FROM INDIVIDUAL TESTIMONIALS TO COLLECTIVE VOICES

According to Wilson (2010), testimonies are “the basis of most of what we know about the world of everyday experience.” (p. 68). In this regard, this collective editorial intends to report individual testimonials to articulate a collective voice. Authors were invited to seek to answer the following question: Why is Openness in Education important, and why is it critically needed at this moment? To achieve this aim, we invited researchers who study, research, and advocate Openness in Education as a praxis to share their testimonies. Those who contributed to this collective editorial are acknowledged as co-authors in alphabetical order and their responses are reported in the following section.

### Taskeen Adam

**Open Development & Education; Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa**

While earlier interpretations of openness focused on the legalities of openness, such as the 5Rs framework (Wiley, 2014), more recent framings of the term have sought to address various socio-political injustices, understanding openness from an equity and social justice lens. This shift has been critical for the movement and has provided the tools and discourse to support open education ambassadors to critically reflect on whether they are taking a multifaceted approach to opening up education.

Some of the themes that have emerged regarding OER include reviewing funding flows to produce OER; ensuring that those in the Global South are also producing OER (i.e., are not just reusing Global North resources); enabling multi-way flow of resources, including from the Global South to the Global North, and creating epistemically diverse material where multiple ways of being and knowing, decolonised historical narratives, and diverse values, cultures and religions are represented.

Beyond OER, there has been much more intentional focus on OEP, also known as open pedagogy or open praxis. Beyond bringing more creative and interactive pedagogies into teaching and learning, OEP can also strive to foster spaces where power imbalances and inequities can be addressed. Further, is the conceptual shift of understanding openness as embodiment, meaning that educators don't just practice openness, but strive to be open and embody openness (Adam, 2020). This shift acknowledges that the body, history and context of the educator (e.g., their languages, cultures, genders, locations, lived experiences, living conditions, and family structures) shape and tailor what and how they teach, and the values they aim to impart, whether consciously or subconsciously.

While Openness in Education can be an enabler for equity and social justice, it is important to acknowledge that with multiple interpretations of the term, openness does not automatically equate to equity or justice. If OER producers and open practitioners are not intentional in what they do, it could reinforce Euro-American epistemologies and institutions, support fake public goods, disrespect indigenous rites of passage to knowledge, and export standardised education globally. Thus, while Openness in Education is important and necessary with the increasing unbundling, privatisation and commodification of knowledge, caution should be taken to ensure it is not co-opted and strives for equity.

**Tutaleni I. Asino**  
**Oklahoma State University, United States**

Openness in Education is about reducing barriers. It is very necessary now because barriers still exist, and in some ways, they have been exacerbated. Barriers exist in education systems in every country. Hence, if we agree with the premise of Openness in Education as a way to reduce barriers, we must also acknowledge that barriers are different in different contexts and spaces. Making Openness in Education conform to one definition would mean that barriers are all the same. This would mean that barriers in Namibia are the same as in Norway or that they are the same in Belarus as in Bolivia. Because barriers differ, this influences how we all come to the openness in the education movement. Some barriers are related to the cost of textbooks which can be resolved by authoring textbooks that can be freely available. Removing these barriers fit within what is commonly known as OER. We have made significant progress in this area, and now it is easy to find OER across numerous disciplines and languages. Another barrier, however, relates to issues of equity and representation. More has to be done in this area, which is why Openness in Education is still essential. I have always maintained that my entrance into open education has been from the perspective of equity and representation (Asino, 2020). My interest in openness is based on the idea that all knowledge systems in the world contribute to human knowledge; when we silence some systems, either implicitly or explicitly, we are missing valuable contributions to the fullness of humanity.

Additionally, we assume that there is a hierarchical system of knowledge where the place one is born determines the value of their knowledge. Openness in Education is still necessary at this particular moment because there is still a need to disrupt the hegemonic power structures of knowledge constructions. This is not only for disruption's sake but for accuracy and contextualization of information needed for learning that ensures that our learners are taught in the fullness of their humanness.

**Javiera Atenas**  
**University of Suffolk, United Kingdom**

Openness, in a context wider than open education, is a catalyser for innovation, cultural change and civic participation, grounded on the values of knowledge co-creation and democratic Open Source has been driving collective design of software to advance science and research for the last two decades, Open Science is transforming the way we do science and the way we train future generations of scientists, providing not only outputs of research, as in Open Access, but encouraging a collaborative, transparent and participative model to advance science, promoting open methodologies and using open software and platform to foster international and interdisciplinary research, while promoting models to widen participation and remove barriers to access culture as promote by the OpenGLAM movement (see <https://openglam.org/>).

Openness also includes approaches related with governance and policy, such as open government, which is a catalyser use of open data, which is data publicly released by governments, international agencies and research centres, which is driving transformation in the economy, education, science, and the way in which citizens participate in democratic discussions, as nowadays, in this datafied society, Open Data is a driver to develop numeracies and data literacies that can enable people to make informed decisions and citizens (Atenas et al., 2019; Atenas et al., 2020).

Open Education is, in a way, the branch of the openness which can bridge these different approaches, as they share a collective ethos, but have different models and methodologies that can be used in the classroom to not only develop OER but to co-create and co-design activities to enhance the learners experience, but contextualising resources and methodologies that can be not just culturally relevant, but transformative, innovative to advance knowledge, widening opportunities for employability while developing critical literacies to participate in society.

**Maha Bali**  
**American University in Cairo, Egypt**

*Open matters*

*Because some of us live inside these walls*

*Locked inside*

And we don't have the key  
 Open matters  
 Because some of us keep hitting our heads on those ceilings  
 We never signed up for  
 And we can't see beyond  
 Open matters  
 Because you can have vision  
 Even if you can't see  
 Open matters  
 Differently  
 For those who face walls  
 For those with no keys  
 For those with no eyes to see  
 No voices to speak  
 No choices to seek  
 Open matters  
 Because sometimes it's the only thing we have  
 The only thing we have to give  
 And you ask me what open looks like  
 And I can't tell you  
 But it's inside my heart  
 And you ask me why open matters  
 And I can't tell you  
 Because sometimes I see nothing else  
 Nowhere else to go  
 But open  
 Because every other road  
 Is walls  
 Close doors  
 And ceilings  
 And sometimes open is what matters  
 Because open is the only way to breathe  
 Sometimes open matters  
 Because open is the only way to be

This poem was originally published on my blog

See Bali (2017) for a certain context. What I wrote at the time was an emotional response to a MOOC about open education in 2017.

I am expressing why openness matters to my intersectional identity. The more oppression we experience in our context, the more vulnerable we are to openness, and paradoxically, the more likely we are to benefit from openness. Openness as liberation, as empowerment, as opportunity, as generosity, reciprocal or not, not just as an economic advantage or a joyful experience. For some of us, openness is the only way out of darkness, and it's a sensibility and worldview that we would suffer without. But some of the more privileged advocates of openness do not understand why open matters to someone like me. Openness can be, but isn't always, a pathway to social justice.

My open practices include blogging by narrating my practice and incomplete thoughts to get feedback and think with others, before I share locally for more intense scrutiny. But am I taking up too much space?



My open practices include Virtually Connecting (see <https://virtuallyconnecting.org/>), which allowed me to have hybrid hallway conversations at conferences all over the world that I could not afford to go to – and helped amplify my voice among other marginalised groups whose faces and voices rarely appear at conferences. Did we really challenge academic gatekeeping or did we reproduce privilege, or create new forms of privilege?

My open practices include Equity Unbound (see <https://equityunbound.org> and <https://onehe.org/equity-unbound/>), which allowed me to respond to educational crises quickly and support all of the worldwide educational community during the COVID-19 pandemic, during the intense periods of Black Lives Matter, during the post COVID burnout period, and the latest shocks from AI.

Openness is not just a practice or a praxis. Openness is a worldview and a way of being in the world. And it can promote social justice if done with Intentionally Equitable Hospitality (Bali et al., 2019; See also <https://equityunbound.org/>).

**Constance Blomgren**  
**Athabasca University, Canada**

Education is like the earth. We, people all over the world, stand upon it and use what it provides to sustain and grow what we pay attention to. We frequently take the earth and therefore education for granted, including the health of education. We collectively find ourselves within the polycrisis, and few thought leaders offer a hopeful portend, and shamefully, their critiques and predictions are not unfounded. In contrast to the grim projections of where we are jointly headed – political, technological, and environmental dystopias – is a vision supported by open education. If people collectively attended to UNESCO's sustainable development goal four – quality education for all – education has the potential to be healthier, vibrant, and sustaining. Rethinking and redeploying when, what, where, why, and how people access formal, informal, and lifelong education is part of “opening up” to the health of education.

Where we stand as educators is important because education has always been a future focused endeavour. What we envision now shapes the future that unfolds. If we are to withstand dystopian forces of actual and metaphorical wind, fire, and flood, we need to attend to our groundworks and say a heartfelt yes to being open to open education.

**Melissa Bond**  
**University College London, United Kingdom; University of Stavanger, Norway**

Openness in Education is vital given the enormity of what the world has experienced in the past several years, such as the global pandemic, war, and natural disasters. Growing financial uncertainty as a result has meant that access to expensive courses and materials is out of reach for many, so the ability for people to access high quality, free textbooks, research and learning opportunities such as MOOCs, despite the trying circumstances they might find themselves in, is incredibly important. Open resources also assist educators who are under incredible pressure themselves and can provide them with access to professional development opportunities that they might never have had without a culture of openness.

Openness in educational research is also important, as the ability to share knowledge freely can enhance understanding across and between contexts, leading to better outcomes. This spirit of generosity and openness can help to bring down some of the barriers that exist within academia and help put an end to the siloing of knowledge. Openness can also help to eliminate ‘research waste’, or the duplication of effort, so that more focused attention can be placed where it is most needed, including the enhancement of digital tools for research and practice.

**Curtis J. Bonk**  
**Indiana University, United States**

For the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) to be celebrating 85 years of existence indicates that many generations of individuals around the world have been devoting their lives to finding ways to open education to the masses. They have also been enhancing, expanding, and, at times, transforming the role of distance education across all levels and aspects of society. During this time, ICDE members and tens of thousands of other scholars have gathered in the name of open and distance education for myriad conferences, summits, institutes, workshops, symposia, announcements, and invited speeches and debates.

They have authored an incalculable number of documents (i.e., books, white papers, technical reports, pronouncements, policy initiatives, grants, curriculum guides, etc.) and designed a wealth of artifacts to help others better understand and appreciate open and distance education. Of course, each of these individuals has also read, discussed, and debated dozens, if not hundreds, of those documents.

Equally important, they have played a role in the creation of an assortment of innovative open, online, and distance education modules, courses, and programs that have made both local and global impact. They are the reason open education is so vital today. As part of those efforts, proponents of open and distance education undoubtedly have been asked more times than they want to remember about the quality of those courses and programs. In addition to quality, they likely have been questioned about how to maintain and sustain a free and open course and how to deal with plagiarism, copyright, and assessment.

They have worked tirelessly throughout their careers to make the world of learning just a tad more open for learners than it was when they started. Early ICDE members may not have envisioned a day quite like today filled with OER, massive open online courses (MOOCs), open education services and practices, and OpenCourseWare (OCW). Nevertheless, they did realise that the social, cultural, economic, and technological progress made on this planet would be enhanced by a world that stepped a little further into the field of open, online, and distance education. A world that would be open for vast self-directed educational pursuits, not closed off from them.

To answer why Openness in Education is important and why it is necessary at this moment in time is simultaneously quite easy, and, at the same time, extremely complex. It is undeniably significant as we build upon the cumulative progress achieved by countless individuals over the past century, many of whom we may never meet and likely will never know. They are the ones who have pushed for new and innovative policies, pedagogies, programs, and instructional practices. Eight or nine decades ago, they did not know that something called the Internet would offer the mechanism of opening education for many billions of learners who did not have such access before. Nonetheless, they realised that the forms of distance education were continuing to evolve and proliferate to potentially democratise and open up education, and they wanted to be part of it.

And here we are today, when the convergence of dozens of technological advancements has cushioned as well as lubricated the entryways to educational access, engagement, and personalization and, as a result, they have indeed made learning at a distance more open. Openness in Education has been the goal for a long time. Today it is just more possible than ever before. The goals are now within reach. Reach out!

**Mark Brown**  
**Dublin City University, Ireland**

This opinion piece questions the mystique and mist of illusion we place around the openness movement. For me, Openness is one of those nebulous ‘aerosol’ words. It sounds good when you spray it about, especially amongst the converts at revivalist-like educational conferences. It would be a brave educator at such events to speak against the altruistic, philanthropic, and ‘public good’ dimensions of the openness movement.

However, like fly spray, Openness is hard to see, you can’t touch it, and when the fine mist dissipates, there is no noticeable residue or visible evidence left in the air to show when it was sprayed and by whom. The air we breathe quickly returns to normal, and the poison’s long-term ‘distal effects’ are hard to measure. Typically, the can of fly spray and its poison is safely put back into the cupboard and only reappears when annoying pests return.

Of course, fly spray is not benign. It is designed to kill bugs! Additionally, some people have adverse reactions to the poison. The fly spray analogy illustrates that the openness movement is not benign—despite a common and underlying assumption that Openness is a ‘good thing’. We need to be wary of false clarity. The uncomfortable truth is that the openness movement is entangled in competing and co-existing languages of persuasion, often with different agenda. Thus, Openness is not a single entity easily defined by lofty principles of access, freedom and egalitarianism.



On the one hand, Openness is typically framed in the hopeful language of access, democratisation, and mass education for all through a meta-narrative of promoting equity, diversity and inclusion. From this perspective, with its roots in the Cape Town Open Education Declaration (2008), the openness movement supports education's public good and the learning society's time-honoured goals, promoting a more fair, socially just and sustainable society.

On the other hand, Openness is imbued in neo-liberal language, which both intentionally and unintentionally supports the goals of deregulation, libertarianism, and the development of a global higher education free market. Arguably, the current unbundling movement and the related emergence of micro-credentials are helping to fuel a new 'supermarket model' of education. This model aims to help people upskill and provide new lifelong learning pathways giving increased choice, flexibility and personalisation. However, it also promotes the idea of higher education as a personal commodity, where students are paying customers rather than partners and co-designers of their learning.

While we need to avoid simple binary perspectives, a narrow focus on developing OER also suggests that education is about designing and delivering content rather than exploring the unknown. Arguably, Education has very little to do with the delivery of content. Moreover, regardless of whether OER delivers on the promise of greater access, increased quality and reduces the cost of education, the history of Openness suggests that we should not expect content alone to transform traditional pedagogy magically.

For the above reasons, we need to understand Openness through a critical wide-angle, multifocal lens that helps teachers, educational leaders and policy-makers to zoom in and out across different viewpoints. This multifocal perspective recognises that various interest groups and stakeholders have appropriated Openness to promote a set of values and legitimise an agenda quite distinct from education as a public good. Thus, the concept of hegemony—in which dominant forces in society seek to establish common sense, define what counts as legitimate areas of agreement and disagreement, and shape the political agendas made public and discussed as possible—is central to understanding the complex and entangled nature of the openness movement.

The key takeaway is that we need a critical conception of Openness as part of an ongoing struggle over who defines what counts as legitimate knowledge. Openness is inherently political and part of wider social practice. We need to anchor our conversations about Openness in deeper critical debates over the fundamental purpose of education and the type of good universities (institutions) and good societies we want to create, especially in the new Age of Artificial Intelligence.

**Daniel Burgos**

**Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (UNIR), Spain**

With no doubt, having an open structure for education is a great support to provide quality training and resources to all educational layers, from students to teachers, through parents and educational institutions. However, not only focused on content, but also on any of the ten basic pillars of Open Education such as: content (already mentioned), access, technology, research data, research results, licenses, policies, accreditation, certification, and interoperability. With this approach, the contents are a key piece but not the only one and, much less isolated. Access and interoperability, to cite two examples, are also necessary for successful implementation. And yet, with this panorama, something is missing: a model of sustainability. The production of OER or the provision of any of the other pillars cannot remain in the hands of individual, well-intentioned or opportunistic efforts, depending on a circumstantial need. The exploitation of these goods and services, in order to achieve a complete deployment of the five Rs (i.e., retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute) (Wiley, 2014), needs a structure of efforts, means, and objectives that allows maintenance and exploitation over time. On top of this, we should add production, because open does not always mean free nor, much less, unilateral. Everything has a cost and, in an open structure, it is also necessary to pay for these services, either in kind, or in exchange for other services, or as part of a tacit and ethical balanced agreement where each user contributes and not only consumes.

The correct integration of non-formal and informal resources, and their associated services, generally the basis of open education, must therefore find an adequate integration of symbiosis

and mutual respect, with more formal and accredited instances. Moreover, it must do so with other sustainability models that do not exclusively articulate the open approach, such as corporate licenses, and exploitation rights.

It is in this balance where Open Education, which we could well extend to Open Science, due to its similarity in approach and foundations, reaches priceless power within the training processes. It is not about choosing between open and close, free and paid, deontologically acceptable and unfortunately hacked. Each moment, each personal circumstance, each society, can integrate and find a balance that allows the correct use of open culture intertwined with more corporate and closed systems. In this way, the scope will be capital to promote coexistence and not exclusion, the synergy of joint work and not xenophobia against the knowledge of others, digital inclusion against social exclusion. This model of sustainability is urgent in each case to achieve a truly significant impact on society and on each potential user as a result of a smart conciliation.

### **Dianne Conrad**

#### **Independent consultant and researcher, Canada**

Openness in education is a noble ideal, and as with so many noble intentions, it can be both held to an unrealistic standard, poorly executed, or inappropriately celebrated or criticised. In short, the “open” context is diverse, nuanced, and complicated. “Open” theoretically wants to provide universal access to quality education by reducing barriers and hurdles to learners’ access and achievements.

A foundational issue that is often overlooked by optimistic innovators is that of equity. While equality hands out the same privileges to individuals and expects to even the playing field in that way, equity recognizes that each individual’s needs will differ, depending on all manner of contexts – socio/politico/cultural, geographical; financial; and those more personal circumstances such as cognitive ability, motivation, and support. There is no silver bullet, no one-size-fits-all.

As with all research, my own explorations of the nature and status of openness are built on the shoulders of my colleagues—international scholars who are too numerous to mention but are no doubt represented in this editorial. In their work, we see calls for collaborative work among agencies and institutions. We see the call for new policies that recognize the importance of equity, of social justice, of reaching out to the marginalised to determine the right doors to open for them.

The challenges to achieving openness in education are many, ranging from macro to micro levels: Macro, where political will either stands in the way of openness or is oblivious to it; and micro, in that potential participants are not adequately versed in procedures, technology, or clarity of purpose. “Open” is a vast and fluid concept; Jan Hylén (n.d.), in an OECD document, outlines definitional confusion around the term. Those attempting to operationalise openness are also confronted with a variety of open licensing options.

I end with two positive examples while acknowledging that global moves toward Openness in Education (as contrasted, say, with politics), in spite of their challenges and duly noted obstacles, continue to gain ground. Such advances are promoted by initiatives such as the Declaration on Knowledge Equity and the Knowledge Equity Network (<https://knowledgeequitynetwork.org/the-declaration/>), which will focus on building future resources and collaborative efforts that are needed to promote openness.

A second, more local positive example concerns a Canadian doctoral research study that examined learners’ responses to creating public-facing resources (O’Reilly, n.d). College-level learners shared their own experiences, trepidations, and feelings of accomplishment after having developed course-related resources as an assignment. Reporting the positive effects of self-knowledge and expanded proficiency, these young learners are the future of educational openness.

### **Eamon Costello**

#### **Dublin City University, Ireland**

Wake me up when open education ends. This is a wish I had at the closing session of the OER conference in Inverness in April 2023. I had this thought not because I wanted the conference

to be over. On the contrary, it was one of the best OER conferences I had ever been to. Education has many opens and OER24, under the auspices of the UK's Association of Learning Technology, had just showcased the best of them. It brought together open educators of many stripes and hues celebrating playful learning, critical pedagogies and open educational practices and policy developments centered on educational equity, inclusion, joy and hope. However, sometimes there are dreams you need to awaken from. If open education were to achieve its purpose, I thought, all this would need to end. If open education were the norm then open education conferences and open educators would be no more, no longer necessary and not special in any way. As open educators we should be working towards making ourselves redundant. What might this radical provocation mean? I am sure I do not have definitive answers but in reflecting on my everyday teaching in Dublin Ireland, I have noticed that creative commons can only ever make a limited impact. The main barrier for me to re-use resources in my teaching are Ireland's restrictive copyright laws. Ireland follows the UK's common law system of copyright and has a fair dealing provision (as opposed to "fair use" of the United States). This clause, as I understand it, massively restricts educators from making legal use of copyright materials for teaching purposes. A change of this law, to give teachers more protection in using materials for non-profit purposes, would benefit more learners than a thousand years of creative commons evangelism ever will.

Open content is not open education. It is not a simple solution to educational inequity. But it is still important. It is simple, boring and important. The question regarding open access is: Are there simple upstream changes that could transform educational landscapes? For instance, could national or regional laws govern *educational curricula* could enshrine open licensing. If changes were made at source they would flow down as a torrent. Open education would be the default. Open educators would be no more. Perhaps this is a pipe dream. However the debate is worth having and the question worth asking: Do we need to awaken from a dream of open education that may be a fantasy that we are guilty of persisting?

**Catherine Cronin**  
**Independent scholar, Ireland**

We live in uncertain –and for many, perilous– times. As starkly outlined in this editorial, in the face of current ecological, political, and humanitarian crises, we need more than good intentions. Social justice must be a core value of our work in open education. Simply stating just intentions is easy, of course ("equity washing" being a partner to "open washing"). The actual pursuit of social justice is only and always a struggle requiring continually critical and continually reflexive approaches, in both research and practice.

Lessons can be drawn from past struggles, particularly other movements for social change — workers' rights, civil rights, women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, etc. All effective social movements for change contend with a plurality of voices, shifting coalitions, and conflict, even when there may be agreement on an overall goal. Such tensions are evident in current debates about open education, as in wider debates about addressing global inequality, climate change, surveillance capitalism, rising authoritarianism, and more. Some individuals may opt to work for incremental practical change, some for policy change, some for legal change, some for setting research agendas. Some abhor the alliances that others actively support. Some see their work as deeply personal while others may change tack to devote their energies in other contexts or sectors.

In considering such histories as we advocate for open education that recognises, values, and serves all, particularly those who have been left behind, knocked down, or hurt by increasingly iniquitous systems and structures, important questions arise. We who imagine open education that is just and emancipatory are many and diverse. How might we create spaces for differences to constitute themselves safely as we share our ideas; how might we engage in careful and caring struggle? How do we advocate for individual and collective rights and well-being for all in the perilous present, as well as being good stewards for future generations?

My energies are deeply engaged in such questions at this moment, and my outlook can be characterised as one of tender hope. I hold hope and commit to open education that realises better futures for all; that is collective and collaborative; that serves both the local and the global good; and that can be characterised as, truly, the practice of freedom:

“I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.” (hooks, 1994, p. 12)

### **Laura Czerniewicz**

#### **University of Cape Town, South Africa**

At this moment, Openness in Education is important because its previous incarnations have lost relevance with too often the term itself having been appropriated by the very forces against which it is supposed to stand. Openness in Education has also become so all encompassing a word that it means whatever a speaker or reader wants it to mean, thus lacking consensus.

In the narrowest sense, openness can simply refer to content being made available under a Creative Commons licence. But in the new era of generative AI, even those licences must, and do, come under scrutiny. When all multimodal content can, and is, mixed and mashed through opaque neural networks and at the click of a button, then machine-read CC licences lose their power both technically and culturally. It is often forgotten that CC licences are a form of copyright; both copyright and the permissions manifest in open licences are urgently and appropriately under review.

In addition to content, Openness in Education is often portrayed and viewed as “nice” and “caring”. When so many educators are overburdened, underpaid contractors, their apparent failure to share and care does not indicate lack of caring as individuals, nor are those open practices individual responsibilities. It rather points to failures of educational systems and sectors which are increasingly turning the education sector into an ironically termed “sharing economy” a gig economy of unbundled services and roles, each squeezing out profits.

Broadly speaking, Openness in Education refers to practices and processes that exist in opposition to the dominant discourses of big tech, platformisation, surveillance and academic metrics systems. This positions openness as a resistance force, an essential role, but limited by being against something rather than for something.

Openness in Education at this moment in time has to be rearticulated, and in particular considerations of governance and structural forms are priorities. Regulatory frameworks and processes to develop them are boring and not the remit (or interest) of most educators, but without such systemic articulations, sustainable open education will be impossible to achieve.

### **Maren Deepwell**

#### **Association for Learning Technology, United Kingdom**

Open Education is a broad term that refers to open, distance education, as delivered by the likes of the Open University, and more recently has come to be used as an umbrella term to cover OER, OEP, open textbooks, open licensing, open assessment practices, open online courses, MOOCs, open data, Open Access scholarly works, open source software, and open standards.

Open Education encompasses resources, tools and practices that are free of legal, financial and technical barriers and can be fully used, shared and adapted in the digital environment. There is a growing evidence base that this improves access and enhances the effectiveness of education globally.

Open Education is not just about cost savings and easy access to openly licensed content; it’s about participation and co-creation and it is rooted in the human right to access high-quality education.

Open Education and OER can expand inclusive and equitable access to education and lifelong learning, widen participation, and create new opportunities for the next generation of teachers and learners, preparing them to become fully engaged digital citizens. Open Education can also promote knowledge transfer while enhancing quality and sustainability, supporting social inclusion and creating a culture of inter-institutional collaboration and sharing.

**Markus Deimann**

**ORCA.nrw (Open Resource Campus), Germany**

Openness has always been and will always be of importance for education for the simple reason that education is about getting to know the world and yourself with as many rich and deep encounters as possible. By this, I am referring to the philosophy of Bildung (Sjöström & Eilks, 2020), the German tradition of self-cultivation which has been outlined for instance by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the beginning of the 19th century. His conception of Bildung has been groundbreaking and foundational for Higher Education.

Given all the current multiple crises in the world, it can be argued that they all have to do with communicating and negotiating solutions among various groups. In order to arrive at common ground we have to find compromises and be open to other perspectives. We should be curious and eager to learn new things not only to utilise or capitalise the acquired knowledge on the labour market but also to enrich ourselves in personal developments. In the theory of Bildung, learning is therefore conceived as a means in itself and without openness towards new fields there is little chance to augment the individual world view. This has become even more important as we are living in a globalised world in which people from all over the world now live and work together. Moreover, the way we operate major areas of society such as education has changed tremendously because of the digitalization (most recently in AI with tools such as ChatGPT) and the pandemic (e.g. new way of delivering teaching such as HyFlex). It is important to be open about these new possibilities and constantly trying to use them in education by asking yourself: How can new technologies be integrated in education in such an approach that there is enough room to critically discuss their impact without getting too defensive too quickly? How can we keep ourselves attached to the ideals of the Enlightenment, defend the democratic society and avoid the cultural backlash of populism which is pushed by technology such as automated bots in social media?

This is my undisclosed desire and I am hoping it will change its status to a manifestation that will guide education during troubled times.

**Helen J. DeWaard**

**Lakehead University, Canada**

Open education is vital for the sustainability of educational systems that are responsive and adaptable to global issues and local needs. In my role as a teacher educator in a Faculty of Education where students learn to become teachers and, as a researcher in the field of open education, I view open educational resources (OER) and open pedagogical strategies (OEP) as ways the field of educational studies can model how education extends beyond local contexts and addresses concerns that connect to global issues. Recent events such as the COVID-19 crisis, the prevalence of war with subsequent mass migrations, and climate change events that disrupt learning demonstrate the pressing need for easily accessible, user friendly, language malleable, and technologically agnostic teaching and learning materials. For individual educators caught in the raging storms of environmental, political, economic, and governance demands, there is great value in finding trusted and reliable sources and communities of practice for openly available and Creative Commons licenced educational materials. These can support instruction, such as those found within the OERCommons (see <https://oercommons.org/about/>), the OEGlobal Network (see <https://www.oeglobal.org/about-us/what-we-do/>) and the Creative Commons Global Network (see <https://network.creativecommons.org/about/>). OER and OEP shared in the spirit of giving freely can make the difference to teaching practices that are increasingly impacted by disaster, trauma, and dramatic change. Maintaining a focus on students' learning needs while continually adapting learning materials can be challenging without these gifts of shared knowledge from experienced educators. OER that allow for remix and reuse within local contexts can contribute to enhancing the open professional practices of educators.

For open educational practices (OEPr), I distinguish between OEP as pedagogically focused and OEPr that include the sum total of an educator's internal ethos and acts of hospitality in relationships as well as scholarship, community activism, and professional identity. Educators facing global crises increasingly shape their OEPr with impactful connections to social justice, critical literacies, and humanizing technological practices in teaching, particularly as the influence of artificial intelligence looms large. As an open educator, I wonder about the



potential for the conception of educommunication to shape emerging discourse into activism and communicative engagements within an OEPr. Educommunication is framed by the Latin American notion of 'lo popular' that focuses on the narratives 'of the people' as mediations of media-infused teaching practices grounded in everyday experiences (Hoechsmann, 2019; Rincon & Marroquin, 2020). This approach to teaching and learning incorporates media practices focussing on current community concerns which are increasingly connected to global issues. Educommunication suggests an end to the division between receivers and emitters of mass media and propaganda that shapes education (Aguaded & Delgado-Ponce, 2019) while continuing to shift the role of educators toward co-creation and collaboration through activism with community, in community. Since educational needs are heightened by global issues and crises, the common good(s) created locally in educational contexts can become the impetus for globally shared OER, OEP, and OEPr. Through reciprocity of resources, pedagogies and practices, it becomes mutually beneficial when global spaces can empower the common good(s) to support local pressing needs.

**Tonia A. Dousay**

**University of Alaska Anchorage, United States**

Recent historical events highlight digital literacy threats to society. In 2016, the U.S. experienced waves of disinformation campaigns on social media seeking to influence the presidential election. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public fears fueled unintentional misinformation campaigns as scientists and world leaders sought to understand a new virus rapidly. This threat later turned to purposeful disinformation as geopolitical priorities clashed with public health demands. Now, nearly half of Americans feel they encounter misinformation daily, and only 36% of society thinks they're somewhat confident or better at detecting false or misleading information (Poynter Institute for Media Studies, 2022).

Unfortunately, this is only the beginning. We now stand on a precipice as AI and large language models present new challenges to digital literacy. Current headlines paint a gloomy picture of current affairs. A company bans employees from using AI tools over data security fears. A professor laments a new era of academic dishonesty as he "catches" students using an AI tool to assist with assignments. A lawyer apologizes for using an AI tool to help write a legal brief that cited at least half a dozen fake court cases. The need for a digitally literate global society is more important than ever. However, this need is predicated on an assumption of access. Indeed, the Digital Media Literacy Core Competencies model created by Canada's MediaSmarts (Centre for Digital and Media Literacy) (n.d.) considers access as both a precondition of digital literacy and an essential skill.

Openness and access are fundamental to literacy. We are at a critical juncture in technoethical development, and access is in jeopardy. The destruction of Twitter provides insight into what happens when the wealthy buy their way to information control. Chaos ensued for weeks when the platform stripped away the ability to identify legitimate accounts, conflating consumerism with authentication. Misinformation flowed rapidly, infiltrating local media and causing a \$15 billion loss in assets for pharmaceutical manufacturer Eli Lilly and Company in less than two days. Twitter demonstrated the dangers facing society by obfuscating access. What happens when we can no longer trust the information we have? Worse, yet. What happens when we lose access to reliable information completely?

If we are to be successful in our role as educators and advocates, we must embrace openness as a prerequisite for learning design amid the ever-shifting demands of a technologically enhanced society. We must demand reliable access for all uses. Most importantly, our approaches must empower learners to be responsible consumers and creators of information and hold them accountable.

**Martin Ebner**

**Graz University of Technology, Austria**

The opening of education and, closely related to this, the free accessibility of educational content is an important fundamental issue for a modern, innovative and, above all, digital society. There are several aspects that must be taken into account and should be pointed out:



1. Democratization of education: Open access to educational content enables society to have educational content available at all times regardless of place, time, and for all segments of the population equally.
2. Diversity-friendly education: Openly licensed educational materials – OER – are in any case further editable and can therefore support persons with disabilities of any kind to adapt the content to their special needs.
3. Bias-free education: Access to all educational content enables AI-based applications to include it in their databases, and this is necessary to avoid that accessibility restrictions can prevent content from appearing in such applications. The sources used for AI training must be traceable and verifiable in order to avoid any bias.
4. Quality education: Open Educational Resources can be adapted, optimised and further developed by a large community, which means that it can not only be kept up-to-date, but also of high quality through many editing loops. The higher the degree of use, the more likely it is that there will be no misunderstandings or errors in it.
5. Lifelong education: Lifelong education is necessary in today's and tomorrow's increasingly digital society. So it is important that educational content is constantly kept up to date and can be accessed by anyone.

Of course, there are other arguments for Open Education, but the relevance for the whole (digital) society should be the starting point, because education is the basic prerequisite for our common coexistence beyond our own national borders.

#### **Robert Farrow**

##### **The Open University (UK), United Kingdom**

Though critical to civilization and social life, education is routinely undermined and treated like a political plaything or source of value extraction. Open approaches are one of the few available counterpoints to the totalising capture of education and training systems in service of capital. It is not just education that is in crisis as a result of divisive profit seeking and structural inequality. Our environment – the possibility of our own existence – is being destroyed. Every day people die from lack of access to sanitation, nutrition, medicine and shelter. Redress through political systems seems hopeless when governments are primarily beholden to corporations, lobbyists, and their own naked self-interest. Hostile information environments contribute significantly to the persistence of this state of affairs. The open information society envisaged in the 1990s has been gradually replaced with a series of walled gardens and increasingly restrictive platformization. We urgently require new, inclusive approaches which leverage technology while remaining centred on authentic human needs. Openness builds from the insight that we cannot live in the future as we have lived in the past, and we can only overcome estrangement and alienation through community and authentic connection.

#### **Inés Gil-Jaurena**

##### **Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain**

While “openness” in education can refer to a wide variety of aspects –from access to education, as a basis, to participatory educational processes– the underlying key aspect of being “open” remains clearly linked to a democratic approach to education. Democracy as a shared political and humanistic principle in mature societies and, at the same time, as a permanent goal to achieve, is particularly relevant nowadays, when aspects such as individualism, violence or fake news become widespread and naturalised. In the field of education, understood as a common good and a universal right, the need to incorporate democratic perspectives appeals to all sectors in the road to supporting people and societies to reach the best from themselves. In this path, openness plays a key role in education as a value that places access opportunities, flexible learning processes or learners’ agency at the center. Both democracy and openness are rooted in a strong belief in humans’ collective and perfective nature, and the importance of openness in education builds upon the humanistic values of equity, respect and participation. The road to utopia needs openness as a value and as a practice, also in education.

Specially, in this historical era, when technology has developed exponentially, technology is a clear driver to openness by facilitating access to resources, interaction and learning. But the

challenge of facilitating access worldwide remains present, along with other structural actions to democratise and open education in a digital world, and educate citizens to become active, critical and reflective agents in their learning process.

### Leo Havemann

University College London/The Open University (UK), United Kingdom

A challenge for advocates of open education is that the term itself remains, to many of our colleagues, somewhat mysterious. It appears to suggest that normal forms of education are closed, without offering much explanation of how the open variant differs, which makes it difficult to explain or understand why it is important. Faced with this dilemma, it might seem tempting for advocates of openness to advance definitions to (rather ironically) enclose its meaning, to contain what is legitimately up for discussion. However, it seems to me that the open genie exited the linguistic bottle rather too long ago – both within and beyond education. If it were possible through this route to gain a less diluted, less ambiguous explanation of open education, we would also give up too much (Havemann, 2020).

There are many educators and students who would describe aspects of their practice as open, whether this might involve adapting OER, open learning design, or teaching in an open university. There are, no doubt, many more who open practices or resources, or participate in or make use of something already open, without necessarily being concerned about applying an open label. Here we might point to activities such as fostering or membership of educational networks or communities, but also perhaps, to public art. Another way of saying this, is that openness is not only necessary but *integral* to education, but there are various forms and degrees of openness. At the same time, if this wide range of activities are all open education, whether they self-identify as such or not, then of course it's reasonable to ask whether this framing is actually helpful.

From a perspective of community and care, as scholarly and practitioner networks, we have more to gain and give by being inclusive than by working in silos; arguably this should be at least a provisional tenet of openness. The significance of the aspect of OEP which involves simply being listened to, and getting engagement, feedback, and sometimes much-needed support from peers receives less attention than it deserves. And from an analytical perspective I would suggest, as the title of this journal has helpfully hinted, that it is indeed useful to understand openness, though in its myriad forms and contexts, as praxis; that is, as work in progress rather than complete, grounded in an intent and practice of intentionally opening resources, practices, processes, communities, to wider participation. Therefore, as researchers of openness, rather than focusing on whether practices are open (enough) or closed, we can more usefully question, in specific contexts, who is doing the opening, how, why, of what, to whom.

### Andreia Inamorato

University of Barcelona, Spain

Openness in education is not a new concept and has always been needed. It has been realised by taking up different forms along the decades, with the main goal to promote inclusion and increase education opportunities for the least favoured individuals. One can think of open universities, asynchronous studies taking place in writing through conventional mailing, phone calls and, since the rise of the Internet, through educational technologies. What is perhaps different nowadays is the speed with which technology advances, and society changes. What is also different is that increased access to education opportunities is needed by all individuals and at all ages. It is no longer a main need of the disadvantaged or marginalised ones. Education is now, more than ever, a lifelong concept. Hence, open education practices and lifelong learning come hand-in-hand. There is a real need for trustworthy information, and education, to be available to all, so that individuals can keep up with the social changes and help build a new way of living, alongside a new labour market, based on fairer, healthier and more participatory social practices. Open Education is part of the third mission of universities. It is also complementary to and supportive of worldwide governmental efforts to make compulsory education available to all, as a basic right for citizens of all countries. Therefore, no one can afford not to understand what open education is, neither to remain stuck with a small vision for it. The greatness and the beautiful complexity of contemporary open education must be fully embraced, understood, dissected and put back together in many ways, again and again. It does not matter that the

definition of open education is broad, on the contrary, it is an asset. It is what makes open education always innovative, and challenging. Open education practices are fluid practices that can evolve at the speed of the social changes. Therefore, educators can and should step up with a unified voice to make open education practices at the core of policies and social rights.

**Valerie Irvine**

**University of Victoria, Canada**

Openness in Education is critical to developing the modern citizen. This is captured by both openness as a mindset and open as a mechanism for licensing and access. Combined, both support: increasing the quality of teaching and learning (through amplified voices of both the instructor and the learner), increasing equality (in terms of access to resources and flexibility via diverse learning pathways), supporting respect (via data ownership, sharing creations with attribution). In a world full of (mis)information noise, the digitally literate citizen with access to quality open resources finds truth, the citizen who shares resources with proper attribution increases trust, the citizen who gets flexibility when they learn experiences safety, and the citizen who gets to keep their course contributions gets fairness. The world needs openness, because in these dark times, our citizens need truth, trust, safety, and fairness.

**Shironica P. Karunanayaka**

**The Open University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka**

Education is about 'sharing'. The concept of Openness in Education may be viewed through many lenses, in terms of removing barriers to learning, sharing resources, collaboration, co-creation, innovation, flexibility, affordability, cost-efficiency, transparency, freedom, social justice...etc., ensuring accessibility, equity, and inclusivity in educational opportunities for anyone and everyone. Through open licensing, OER enable free and open access, reuse, repurpose, redistribution, and adaptation of resources to address different contextual and learning needs, especially considering learners with special educational needs, and under-privileged or marginalized groups. The shift of focus from resources to practices via the concept of OEP further enhances opening-up educational opportunities through sharing of educational resources and participatory pedagogical practices, augmented with advancing digital technologies.

Promoting open practices in education leads to the empowerment of both teachers and learners who inevitably play a significant role in the co-creation of knowledge in the present knowledge society. As key agents of transformational change in education, empowered teachers and learners can harness the potential and affordability of emerging open technologies and open pedagogies to engage in creative, innovative, and scholarly practices of openness. Implementing open practices in such a way to promote a culture of collaborative practices essentially require significant changes in practitioners' mindsets to drift away from conventional thinking and move towards a more open, participatory, creative and sharing culture. Such change is best achieved through systematic design of appropriate and meaningful learning experiences. Designing and implementing contextualized and process-oriented interventions in collaboration with practitioners, and co-investigating real-life issues through reflective enquiry will support shifting mindsets and changing practices.

Enacting radical changes towards openness in educational institutions will require strategic and systemic approaches involving awareness raising, capacity building, supportive policy development, open licensing of educational materials, motivation, and incentivizing open practices. Creation of 'communities of practice' engaged in open practices will support a culture of cooperation and sharing among diverse stakeholders, enabling achievement of shared 'open' missions of individuals and institutions. Fostering Openness in Education is thus imperative to develop more inclusive and resilient knowledge societies in a constantly changing world shaped by digital transformation and disruptive technologies.

**Michael Kerres**

**University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany**

While open and free access to education is highly valued and established in countries in Europe, the internet has opened a new arena for the delivery of education that has been quickly taken up by private enterprises. Digital Education promises to be a prosperous field of business – dominated by few global internet companies. Public education is lagging behind and seems to be largely dependent on the tools and data these companies are (or will be) providing. Currently,

schools and educational institutions seem to be integrating digital tools in existing courses and are transferring trainings to the internet. At this stage, the spirit of “open education” and “education as a public good” can be implemented in the digital environment.

In the future, however, they will depend on platforms and AI-based tools from these vendors that rely on the observation of learners and teachers and (currently mostly) are NOT opening up their data sources and algorithms to the public. Therefore, we are in a phase where the educational system is strongly challenged by these new players and technologies. We need to understand that technology is not a neutral addition to improve education but in itself is shaping the educational system. The term “open education” will have to be reconsidered in this transition. The idea of public education still is an important cultural achievement contributing to the inclusion and participation of people and needs to be repositioned given these developments.

**Sarah Lambert**  
**Deakin University, Australia**

Openness is important to me because it’s about collegial sharing between educators while we are innovating in online and distance education. It’s a place to stretch our ability while we keep students’ needs and the learning requirements in mind. It’s where we extend our understanding of what good assignments and engagement in learning can look like in a digitally enabled world. We are continually learning about learning. The Open Education community is a place where we can relinquish some control and status of being ‘the sage on the stage’ and try new approaches such as co-creating with students and even un-grading. This is important because educators can feel isolated and even oppressed where organisational cultures undervalue teaching, or simply prefer the status-quo in practice, regardless of the innovative teaching mission statement. Where can we go to connect with educators who care less about lecturing and more about conversation? How can we remove even more barriers to learning for diverse student groups? Open education is a community for this, and it is needed more than ever.

Writing from a Higher Education perspective, Open Education is necessary right at this moment because it is a relatively safe space for fair-minded educators to resist the pressures we face from constant budget cuts and doing more with less. The Open Education community provides collegiality and support during times when casualisation and powerlessness can lead to division. In some cases, the Open Education community has been a place to nurture resistance against the worst of the cuts and oppressions. Open Education’s ability to embrace social justice, decolonial, and anti-racist teaching has become paramount on a global scale, as we see technology improve, but wealth inequality and social division increase. I see colleagues in the US face oppressive budget cuts and state-based legislation that hampers anti-racist education work. They are not alone. In Australia, Higher Education was the only industry not to receive govt bail-outs during COVID. For us, and globally, the negative COVID effect on Higher Education continues. But the Open Education Community comes together informally and at bespoke events, locally and around the globe, to re-ignite our agency to influence digital pedagogy for student benefit through a wide range of open practices.

This includes supporting open publishing of our work. It is harder than ever to find reviewers, and no wonder considering the commercial academic publishing model, built on the exploitative labour of writers and reviewers. But through our ongoing work to produce truly open avenues to publishing, as editors of Gold Open Access publications, or through running peer-reviewed blogs or digital book formats – we continue to find fairer alternatives. This is also a crucially valuable area of our work in these difficult times, and again we show leadership in how to resist and provide alternative spaces for doing academic and education work differently.

**Kyungmee Lee**  
**Lancaster University, United Kingdom & Seoul National University, South Korea**

Today’s Distance Education (DE) is commonly assumed open as its medium, the Internet, is inherently considered open. Despite the predominance of openness in theory, such an assumption is problematic as educational inequality grows alarmingly in reality, outdistancing the educational openness that DE has strived to achieve for many decades.

DE must be more explicit about its ultimate goal. “Open” must be spelt out, not assumed, especially in educational systems governed by market-driven interests.

Being open is not always as simple as being free of charge or flexible. Openness is a situated and contextual notion; open education in individual learners’ unique historical contexts can have multiple faces. Openness in DE can be pursued at four levels according to its transformative impact.

At the basic level, DE should enable have-nots to have an educational opportunity. Next, DE should enable have-nots to have autonomy in their learning. DE should then enable have-nots to have a legitimate membership in their community. However, openness in DE cannot be reduced only to individual access-and-success issues. Educational inequality in a bigger society needs to be reflected. Ultimately, DE should enable have-nots to have a political voice in their society. Distance learners’ experiences, in a collective sense, should contribute to positive social transformations.

It is a welcoming attempt to draw united voices about “why openness is important in today’s education”. The decision to start with individual testimonials is clever. The nature of ‘testimonial’ is historical and transcendental—autobiographic memories have a great place in celebrating the 85th anniversary of ICDE, which was once (and long—from 1938 to 1982) called the International Council for Correspondence Education.

Seven-year-old me went to school only in the afternoons as my school could not accommodate all students. Many urban schools with fast-increasing enrolments in South Korea in the early 1990s ran morning and afternoon classes with divided student groups. In the mornings, while waiting for school to open, I often watched educational TV programmes offered by the Korea Educational Broadcasting System. My favourite programme specifically targeted my year group.

The air time and length were fixed, and my family did not own a video recorder. I just had to sit down and turn on the TV at the scheduled time. Despite their inflexible and unidirectional nature, I enjoyed my first DE experiences and dreamed of being a teacher on those programmes. My passion for DE must have come from those experiences, which became my firm foundation for becoming an autonomous learner and a legitimate member of the DE community with critical awareness and voice.

Thirty years later, my seven-year-old daughter lost access to her classroom during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Her Internet was seemingly much fancier than my TV; however, it is unclear if her DE experiences were as open as mine. Countless children and adults around the globe still are have-nots. DE can open up so much more than school doors and textbook knowledge. However, not all DE is open. DE can be affordable, flexible, convenient, and even social—all of them but open.

### **Mpine Makoe**

#### **University of South Africa, South Africa**

Openness as an approach and practice encourages the culture of learning, creating, sharing and working together as a community of researchers, teachers, designers and students. It also promotes activities that are concerned not only with using Open Education Resources (OERs) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), but of producing and co-producing knowledge from diverse contexts and making it available through open access. The flexible nature of openness is key to enabling equitable access to quality education as well as supporting professional collaboration by enabling access through using a variety of routes that are formal, non-formal and informal. By doing so, it challenges higher education that has been criticised for being elitist and exclusionary in nature. Therefore, open education should be understood in relation to its social justice mandate which is meant to address historical institutionalised injustices (Hodkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018). Social justice as a concept is in line with open education that supports the notion that the provision of education should be based on the principles of inclusivity, accessibility, flexibility to ensure that there is equitable access to quality education to all.

It is therefore important that open education should be viewed beyond what it does to what is meant to achieve. As the cost of higher education has become more and more prohibitive, it becomes more urgent that institutions explore different methods and approaches that



enable access to higher education. This need is even more acute in developing countries in Africa where there is a massive demand for skilled workforce to enhance economic growth and global competitiveness. The efficacy of open education in promoting access to learning is premised on the notion that it can accommodate an increased and more diverse student population at reduced costs. Hence, increasing access and participation in higher education is a major policy issue in many African countries. This is because many of these countries recognize higher education qualifications as a critical component of economic development. However, they have not been successful in addressing this need even when they are aware that high levels of education correlates with improved economic outcomes.

Despite the benefits of open education, there is very little understanding of what open education is and what it entails. Challenges confronting open education practices range from lack of empirical studies that focus on the pedagogies, theories and the impact of open education practices in addressing the social justice mandate of education. The transition to open education is a major paradigm shift in the way teaching and learning is viewed and managed in higher education institutions. The success of open education is dependent on systematic approaches to planning and managing the implementation of these practices. The challenge is how do we harness the potential of open education practices to foster equitable inclusive education and increase the number of students who have access to quality education.

**Victoria I. Marín**  
**Universitat de Lleida, Spain**

Openness in Education has traditionally aimed at removing barriers for learning, as well as at supporting student independence and autonomy in their learning process. However, and in line with other researchers, I argue for a deeper understanding and application of openness in education. In front of individualist values and practices centred on the student as an individual, open education, and especially OEP, could put the emphasis on the community and on critical action. This approach considers not only the individual, but instead goes beyond it to embrace other values that take into account the community too. For instance, freedom in terms of learning choices while assuming individual and collective responsibility in learning, or individual autonomy combined with social interdependency. From this perspective of considering personal or individual aspects (e.g., autonomy, individual responsibility), but also social (interdependency, collective responsibility) and contextual elements (possibilities for choices, inclusion), Openness in Education has a close connection to the promotion of student agency. In addition, Openness in Education in its different forms would be necessarily linked to critical digital pedagogy. By considering this connection, Openness in Education is also seen from a social justice approach that aims at promoting inclusive and critical digital citizenry, supporting democracy and (active) participation.

In our current postdigital landscape of increasingly fuzzy boundaries between the digital and the analogue, where technological determinism and technological companies' economic interests have their way to education paved, openness may be a cornerstone instrument in education to critically address societal issues and find solutions as a community for the common good. If we concrete it in the form of OEP, a major implication is challenging the traditional teacher role in education, as well as the same institutional educational structures that keep teaching and learning among the four walls of the classroom. In these OEP that link to critical digital pedagogy, students' possibilities to be involved in their learning as active co-creators in their trajectory of lifelong learning are opened up, as well as their chances for transforming their surroundings beyond formal education. At the same time, they are developing their critical digital literacies. This involves, for instance, considering aspects of control of and access to digital learning spaces, data and digital production and ownership, or interconnected and transnational collaboration for critical digital citizenry.

Are we ready for these critical approaches in Open Education?

**Alexander Mikroyannidis**  
**The Open University (UK), United Kingdom**

Openness in Education is important and necessary at this moment as the need for open upskilling and reskilling is becoming increasingly prominent in today's fast-paced economy. This is due to a variety of factors, most notably the changing nature of work, an ageing population,



as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Openness is instrumental in addressing the needs of lifelong learners and job seekers to upskill or reskill, and can be greatly facilitated by the emergence of novel decentralisation technologies, particularly Blockchain and Web 3.0. The emergence of these technologies offers opportunities to transform open education and open upskilling/reskilling, by influencing how open educational content is produced and shared, as well as by equipping lifelong learners and job seekers with open and immutable accreditation.

A Blockchain is a publicly shared immutable ledger, which uses crypto-currency techniques to minimise any security risk. This technology offers a decentralised peer-to-peer infrastructure, where privacy, secure archiving, consensual ownership, transparency, accountability, identity management and trust are built-in. Blockchain technology can act as a provenance protocol for sharing data across disparate semi-trusting organisations, without the need for any central control. Web 3.0 is employing Blockchain technology in order to move web data away from the control of a few companies, and instead establish Blockchain-based applications and services, so that the control of web data is openly and transparently distributed among users.

Decentralisation supports the implementation of the UNESCO (2019) Open Educational Resources (OER) Recommendation, by facilitating the capacity building of stakeholders to create, access, re-use, adapt and redistribute OER. More specifically, decentralisation technologies offer secure mechanisms for recording the provenance of data. These mechanisms can be used to securely record the provenance of OER so that intellectual property rights are protected. The immutability offered by the Blockchain ensures that the provenance records of OER always remain valid and cannot be tampered or falsified. Additionally, a Blockchain-based reputation point system can offer incentives to stakeholders for authoring, reusing, adapting and redistributing OER.

Recent research conducted in the context of the European project QualiChain (<https://qualichain-project.eu>) has explored the impact of decentralisation technologies in open education. In particular, QualiChain has investigated the creation, piloting and evaluation of decentralisation solutions for storing, sharing and verifying education and employment qualifications, in order to empower lifelong learners in taking control over their learning process and data (Mikroyannidis et al., 2020). The outcomes of this work indicate that decentralisation technologies hold great potential towards revolutionising open education (Mikroyannidis, 2022).

### **Sanjaya Mishra** **Commonwealth of Learning, Canada**

Before I reflect on the topic, let me emphasize that open education is neither OER nor OEP. The latter two are a subset of open education that emerged recently, while open education as a concept and praxis has existed for some time. The earliest form of open education in the twentieth century was practised by Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who inspired the setting up of the National Extension College in the United Kingdom (Latchem & Jung, 2009). To ensure equity and access, the idea of 'openness' is rooted in the altruistic goal of democratizing education for all, especially for the marginalized, economically poor, and socially disadvantaged. This foundation formed the basis of the proliferation of open universities and distance education that provided second-chance education, especially for working adults.

However, manifesting the idea of 'openness' took various forms in practice. While open education provided options for anyone to study any subject of choice, from anywhere and at any time, not all courses and programmes available from open universities provided these options due to various other considerations and therefore were often not open in praxis. The concept of 'openness' also created issues related to parity of esteem in the courses offered through face-to-face education vs. those offered at a distance until the COVID-19 pandemic, when almost every educational level adopted some form of technology to teach. While this is a silver lining for open and distance education, understanding and applying the values and principles of openness still need to be included.

Today, the technological developments around us make it inevitable for education planners and policymakers to adopt the principles of openness. Like the need for second chance education for working people in the 1970s, the pace of change in the work environment and the use of Artificial Intelligence and robotics make training and retaining human resources essential. The economic landscape requires a support structure for lifelong learning, which requires flexibility offered by openness to ensure that educational opportunities are accessible

to all at a low cost. People need work-integrated learning and micro-credentials that can be earned and stacked quickly and flexibly with freedom of choice for time, place, and pace.

Educational institutions and curriculum designers must rethink how courses and programmes are delivered in the 21st century. Are these flexible to promote lifelong learning for all? Are the courses and programmes affordable for those who need these the most? Do the programmes recognize prior learning and provide alternative pathways to gain competence? Educational institutions may benefit by adopting my openness framework, which includes ten different criteria to implement (Mishra, 2023).

### Som Naidu

#### Technology, Education and Design Associates, Australia

A quick review of educational provision globally will show that large numbers of people lack access to adequate educational opportunities. Current estimates by UNESCO and the World Bank, show that more than a quarter of a billion children and youth globally are out of school. Major barriers to access to educational opportunities are the lack of opportunities for schooling, its cost, and gender-based barriers to participation. UNESCO (2023) estimates also suggest that millions of children, girls especially, may never get back to school after the COVID-19 pandemic—which is not an uncommon occurrence following most such natural disasters, especially in developing contexts.

The provision of educational opportunity ought to be seen as a basic human right, much like we see the provision of food, water, and shelter—for education has the potential to free minds and mindsets. Freedom is not simply about being able to participate in political processes. It is about having the capacity to make choices about one's lives and livelihoods—to be able to avoid diseases like HIV/AIDS, and practices like female genital mutilation, and child marriage, etc. We know that children born to educated parents have far greater chances of survival than those without, and that literacy can lead to improved lifestyles, and help reduce poverty. However, without a systemic rethink and re-engineering of educational provision, universal access to education will almost certainly remain a pipe dream!

This is why we need to embrace the idea of open education, for without it, access to the desired levels of educational opportunities is surely going to be constrained and compromised (Naidu, 2016). The idea of open education has the potential to help access to educational opportunity. We know this from the practice of distance education which, with the help of rigorously designed self-instructional learning materials, can reach learners regardless of their physical location and prevailing circumstances. All lives have equal value; however, access alone may not be enough. Another dimension of openness is the adoption of flexible approaches to learning and teaching, to afford learners the freedom and the flexibility to choose the mode, medium, time, place, and pace of their study. These are strategies that are not place and/or timebound, and such they allow teachers to adopt strategies that support individual learning contexts and help support the personalization of learning.

A further dimension has to do with the adoption of a culture of openness in relation to intellectual property rights, and the adoption, use, reuse, redistribution, and the sharing of information and educational resources openly and freely. Too much of intellectual property and educational resources are locked behind paywalls, and in the hands of the privileged. Without the release of these resources for open access, in order to be able to reach the less privileged, there can be no equality. And without equitable access to educational resources, the disadvantaged are destined to remain so, and unable to compete on a level playing field. Seen in this way, the adoption of open educational practices is a value proposition, much like we see freedom and justice in our lives. It is not a choice, but a basic need and a public good that should be accessible to all, if we were to ever achieve, or come close to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2021) agenda of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.

### Fabio Nascimbeni

#### European Training Foundation, Italy

I believe that Open Education, intended as an *ethos* that privileges co-creation, sharing and learning across the formal education boundaries, is more important now than it has never been, because of two main reasons.

First, we are in the middle of a probably unprecedented technological acceleration, connected – but not limited to – to the raise and popularisation of generative artificial intelligence, that poses fundamental questions on the very nature of knowledge and questions existing assumptions in areas such as intellectual property. In a world where machines will be able to instantly design learning activities and produce learning content, reusing basically all the available resources on the web, what will be the new meaning of *open*?

Second, the COVID experience has shown that massive implementation of digital education can create problems related to educational exclusion and mental health issues. Even if these problems were exacerbated by the urgent need to move education into online settings, often without the necessary reflections and preparation, these issues remain, and can be mitigated by using more inclusive educational approaches, both in terms of costs and of inclusive pedagogies. Also here, the use of OER and more in general of Open Educational Practices can help.

In other words, the current unprecedented technological developments coupled with the lessons learnt from the pandemic are calling for more inclusive and innovative education approaches: Open Education can be one of the leverages for this to happen. For this to become a reality, the Open Education community needs to take action through awareness raising and systematisation of successful practices, to make sure that the upcoming policy decisions are informed by and do take into account Open Education options and developments.

### Mark Nichols

#### Te Pūkenga (and Commonwealth of Learning Chair), New Zealand

‘Openness’ is not a term that we in open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) tend to associate with anything other than education. But think about your most recent experience of services outside of education.

- Banking: an app gives you 24/7 access to your accounts, and the option of opening new accounts anytime and place.
- Media: any number of subscriptions will give you instant access to a range of options you can initiate and experience when it suits you.
- Retail: a plethora of virtual stores let you access almost any item at any time, from anywhere, delivered to you. In the modern world, you have the most access across the greatest range of products and services than at any time in history. Customer service improves, while costs decrease.

Higher education stubbornly defies this trend. Openness – in terms of anytime, anyplace, anyone access, not just within enrolment cohorts but even *instead* of them (so including anytime start and anytime completion) – remains the exception, rather than the norm.

What might once be viewed as an eccentricity increasingly needs to become an imperative. Education remains closed at its peril. Yet, when we think of higher education, there are often the underlying assumptions that semesters, classes, lecture halls, student cohorts, the physical campus, should define the university or polytechnic. There is plenty of evidence that open education can be at least as effective – and certainly more efficient – as its closed alternative.

It is high time we talked about education not in terms of aspirational openness, but in terms of ignorant closedness. Our assumption should be that *all* educational opportunities must be open; it is the closedness we should draw attention to. Appreciating that ‘open’ is now our daily norm across all other spheres of modern life, we might instead reverse the conversation such that we label instead education that is opposite: closed, situated, rigid. Openness in Education is important because it is the future of education. Its opposite – closed, situated, rigid – continues to exist only because we assume its superiority based on its deep foundations, and the need to sustain the sunk costs of campuses.

### Don Olcott, Jr.

#### HJ & Associates, Romania

Openness in Education is the moral manifestation of a free and open society, empowering knowledge access and fostering educational opportunity for all citizens. Openness is a reflective mirror of the openness within a society. Moreover, open education does not purport

to advocate a particular form of government nor promise equal outcomes, only the free and accessible opportunity to knowledge to pursue and improve one's life. The open access to knowledge reflects the underlying values of free speech, social justice, inclusion, and humanity across open societies. Indeed, Openness in Education is a catalyst for UN's (1948) fundamental principles of Education for All and Education as a Human Right.

Today, disruptive and controlled autocratic and populist forms of government are threatening these democratic and educational principles. Academic freedom is under siege in universities across the globe, freedom of speech and assembly are being suppressed by armed force and legislation; and often times hate speech and violence go unabated. In free, open and transparent societies these threats are tempered by openness rather than suppressed under the control of closed governments. Conversely, closed societies and universities are unable to embrace openness because those in power have barricaded the people's access to, and practice of, the fundamental principles of access, freedom, justice and inclusion related to knowledge and education.

As an instrument of humanism, Openness in Education is a contributory 'educator of the masses' to illuminate, protect, preserve and defend the principles of an open society. In the final analysis, Openness in Education is the moral equivalent of free speech in a democratic society empowered by freedom, justice and inclusion. Indeed, these principles are the heart and soul of openness in its purest, most empathetic and humanistic support of the human condition. We are in this together.

### **Ebba Ossiannilsson**

#### **International Council for Open and Distance Education OER Advocacy Committee, Sweden**

The COVID -19 pandemic highlighted and exposed the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the education system and its structures. Online and distance learning, open access, open science, and open educational resources helped ensure that access to education was uninterrupted even while schools were closed. But even before and during the pandemic, UNESCO was working on a global consultation because of the urgent need for a new social contract for education and the need to rethink education together (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). UNESCO's work on the Transforming Education Summit (UNESCO, 2022) also aims to implement and achieve both SDG4 and the new social contract.

Openness in Education is important and relevant at this moment because it is a way, perhaps the only viable, realistic, and humane way, to achieve education for all, i.e., the UN UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UN, 2021). Quality education is a human right (UN, 1948) Open education promotes first and foremost that education is a human right and crucial for equality, social justice, and democracy. Open education is probably one of the most effective, safe, credible and cost-efficient ways to provide and deliver education for all based on human dignity and justice. Open education supports the ongoing shift toward digital learning and the integration of technology into education. It helps bridge the digital divide by making educational resources accessible to those who do not have access to traditional educational infrastructure. Open education enables the rapid development and dissemination of resources to meet the immediate needs of learners and educators facing the challenges of distance education and hybrid learning environments. Open education and online learning platforms provide opportunities for self-directed and self-paced learning, enabling individuals to acquire knowledge and skills independently. Open education is also a way to address the rising cost of education, the demand for continuous professional development, lifelong learning, and the importance of global collaboration and understanding. Besides the 5Rs framework (Wiley, 2014). I will emphasise two more Rs, Recognition and Recontextualization. Open education is also in the core for lifelong learning and learnability.

### **Daniel Otto**

#### **European University for Innovation and Perspective, Germany**

Openness in Education is vital as it holds the power to transform the landscape of learning, making knowledge accessible, inclusive, and equitable for all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, geographical locations, or socioeconomic status. In today's rapidly evolving world, marked by technological advancements, especially in artificial intelligence and a

maturing global society, Openness in Education has become increasingly necessary to address the diverse challenges we face and harness the immense potential for collaborative and lifelong learning.

At this moment, we find ourselves in a world of immense complexity, where traditional educational models struggle to keep pace with the rapid changes unfolding around us. Openness in Education acts as a catalyst for innovation, enabling us to embrace emerging technologies, pedagogical approaches, and alternative learning pathways. It encourages us to rethink traditional boundaries, fostering a culture of sharing, collaboration, and co-creation that empowers learners and educators alike.

The need for Openness in Education is further magnified by the urgency to bridge existing educational divides. Inequities in access to quality education persist globally, hindering social mobility and exacerbating disparities. OER and OEP dismantle barriers by providing free or low-cost materials, enabling learners to encounter educational content at their own pace, and empowering educators to adapt and localise resources to meet diverse needs. Through openness, we can disassemble barriers to knowledge and cultivate a more inclusive society that values and supports lifelong learning.

Moreover, Openness in Education nurtures a culture of transparency and accountability. By embracing OEP, institutions and educators become more accountable to learners, fostering trust and collaboration in the educational process. Openness encourages sharing best practices, enables review and evaluation, and facilitates continuous improvement of educational offerings.

In a nutshell, Openness in Education is essential and particularly crucial in our present moment. By embracing openness, we can unlock the full potential of education, harness the power of technology, promote inclusivity, and address the pressing challenges facing our societies. Through collective efforts guided by the principles of openness, we can shape a future of education that is accessible, empowering, and transformative.

**Brenda Cecilia Padilla Rodriguez**  
**Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon, Mexico**

Despite considerable efforts to improve education in Mexico, inequalities persist. Access to high-quality opportunities for learning and development seems to be reserved for certain groups. The divide between the “haves and have nots” is wide. Open education can help us bridge these disparities and foster a more inclusive educational landscape.

The essence of open education lies in sharing with others. Offering freely available and adaptable courses, resources and practices can help to level the field for all students and teachers. This is particularly crucial for marginalised groups, such as those who speak indigenous languages or live in remote areas. Openness can enable them to access educational content tailored to their specific needs without an associated financial burden.

By embracing open education, Mexico can shift away from expensive private education models and democratise access to quality education. It can foster collaboration between teachers and empower students from all backgrounds.

At the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon in Mexico, I have organised editathons where learners, academics and researchers come together to create or edit Wikipedia articles. Many participants join not really believing that they have something valuable to share, and then they realise that they do. They contribute to open knowledge, and they become part of the largest initiative to document knowledge in human history.

This moment is key for open education. When the Covid-19 pandemic started, educational institutions, teachers and students struggled with the rapid transition to online learning and the use of technologies. Few years later, many see opportunities where they previously saw challenges. It is the right time to share, to build upon the lessons learned and to capitalise on the affordances of the improved digital infrastructure.

**Michael Paskevicius**  
**University of Victoria, Canada**

Openness in Education is important at this moment as research has shown it has the potential to enable flexibility, personalization, collaboration, sharing of practice among educators, and



human-centred approaches to teaching and learning across disciplines and at a variety of educational levels. Education, at its core, is about sharing knowledge and culture. While the theme of openness has a long history in educational contexts, it is now important that we extend and consider these core values into the design and selection of educational resources, collaboration platforms, and digital learning environments. Intentionality and an orientation towards open education practices can have a meaningful impact on learning design, accessibility, and how we share practices and approaches to teaching and learning.

I am particularly excited about the potential for open education to permeate in K-12 contexts where teachers may face challenges in finding and developing contextually relevant and timely teaching and learning materials and when seeking to support personalization and inquiry driven approaches to learning. I believe that the ways in which open education can enable new approaches to teaching and learning are yet unrealized and offer much promise at all levels of education.

While I am excited about what teachers can do, I am even more excited about the potential for students to engage with, remix, and be creative with open resources, text, data, and other types of multimedia. Crucially, we also have an opportunity to extend the philosophy and digital literacies associated with open education to our young learners, to enable them to participate as creators, remixers, and critical reviewers in the information age. In doing so, learners may take control and have more ownership of their learning and how they represent knowledge in creative ways.

Open education is necessary as it will require us to challenge assumptions about the default approaches and environments suitable for learning design, raising questions about dominant ideologies, platform capitalism, datafication, and privacy. It seems that many decisions about policy and technology within educational institutions are made expediently to meet short term goals of convenience. Positioning open education as a fundamental principle of design and as an intentional orientation to meet the needs of public education can serve as an aspiration to guide the future direction of institutions.

**Verena Roberts**  
**Concordia University of Edmonton & University of Calgary, Canada**

As I wake up in Canada breathing in smoke that burns my throat, I wonder what kind of world I am passing on to my children. Wicked problems, like solving the global climate crisis, can only be solved by connecting with others through interdisciplinary networks that bring a wide variety of expert perspectives to challenge the current narratives and solutions. Open learning provides the opportunity for any learner to contribute their perspective and expertise in solving these formidable problems.

Open learning environments can be considered an active and engaging learning ecosystem with potentially fertile learning opportunities which provide the types of nourishment that enables learning to grow. Gardens are greatly influenced by conditions like sunlight and water sources, insect infestations and soil type. Like gardens, the learning experience is often not the same for every learner and is dependent upon the interactions between the learner and other elements within the ecosystem. The systemic conditions influence the learners' opportunities.

Developing a learning ecosystem which supports open learning requires an intentional design for sharing, collaborating and interacting with others within and outside the garden. The bees that come and pollinate help the garden grow while nourishing their own colonies. Cross-pollination sustains the systemic networks that supports multiple elements within the learning ecosystem. Openness in Education provides instructors an opportunity to expand individual learning environments, while at the same time, supporting and responding to all of the learners' independent and diverse needs. Open learning balances individual learner needs while still promoting the potential growth for learners outside of the immediate learning space through OEP, open access, OER and open data.

By providing the resources and supports to connect alternative ways of thinking and knowing, open learning provides the opportunity to design new strategies to try and solve wicked problems while at the same time encouraging instructors an opportunity to expand individual learning environments.



In the educational landscape, digitalization has opened new platforms and extended the meaning of Openness in Education which were limited to traditional open education media channels and physical proximity. In the era of digitalization, the accessibility and availability of information has intensified the support to openness in terms of flow of information, collaboration and innovation. It has empowered the marginalised individuals, remote communities and organisations for sharing the knowledge in more flexible, equitable and innovative ways.

**Robert Schuwer**  
**Independent consultant and researcher, Netherlands**

The current period is characterised by major challenges. The global climate crisis, a growing number of refugees in Europe, an ageing population in Europe, but also increasing disinformation and, especially since the COVID pandemic, a growth in numbers of followers of conspiracy theories. International cooperation, at all levels, and an adequately educated population are necessary prerequisites to tackle these challenges effectively. In doing so, exchange of knowledge and information should not be a barrier. All this argues in favour of open education, more specifically adoption of open educational resources, because it breaks down both barriers to knowledge exchange and barriers to access to high-quality learning materials.

Article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads (UN, 1948)

*“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”*

This article is the foundation for openness in education. It requires both an approach of education as a public good that serves humanitarian values, next to the approach as viewing education having more utilitarian, economic values (Sloep & Schuwer, 2016). Open education, and more specifically OER, are ideally suited to shaping education from the humanitarian values approach. E.g. the 5R rights of OER (Wiley, 2014) makes localising and providing a voice to minorities easier.

Challenges for adoption of (forms of) Open Education are manifold. When focusing on OER, being an important element of Open Education, the most recent challenge is the rise of Gen-AI, where ChatGPT is most visible. Although citing sources is still an issue, the tool is improving rapidly. This gives great opportunities for rapid on-the-fly creation of learning materials. However, this may lead to less sharing and reuse of OER, which means, for example, that innovations in education and learning materials are less likely to be shared. This has the risk of leading to impoverishment in the supply of learning materials. In addition, to safeguard the humanitarian values approach, more openness is needed in the data used to feed these tools.

**Ramesh C. Sharma**  
**Dr B R Ambedkar University Delhi, New Delhi, India**

In India (now the most populated country in the world), and it can also represent the Asian context, Openness in Education is an appropriate response to the ever increasing demands for education. The openness has served a dual purpose: (a) bringing quality to existing correspondence courses, and (b) providing access to quality education to the masses. It has resulted in the shift of emphasis from teacher-centered education to learner-centered education. It has further encouraged lifelong learning opportunities for needy persons through making optimum use of technology towards democratising education. Openness in Education refers to the philosophy and practice of providing unrestricted access to educational resources, tools, and opportunities. It emphasises removing barriers to learning, enabling learners to access educational materials and participate in educational activities regardless of their geographical location, socioeconomic background, or other limiting factors. Openness in Education is crucial at this moment because traditional education got disrupted due to the recent pandemic (COVID-19). Further, the job market has evolved rapidly, and the nature of work has changed. Digital technologies have transformed the educational landscape. Openness in Education helps in upskilling or reskilling citizens through relevant curriculum, integration of technology and bridging educational inequalities.

**Bonnie Stewart**  
**University of Windsor, Canada**

To me, openness is a collection of technical, social, and pedagogical practices that are based in critical and participatory approaches to the web, and that are – ideally – about building a web of shared community knowledge. My introduction to the term “open” in education was also my introduction to digital learning, back in the late 90s. My Canadian university had an Open Learning Department, modelled on the UK’s Open University and focused on distance ed and widening participation in higher learning, using the early internet. I learned about the open source movement a few years later, but my own foundations in open come from that more pedagogical model of breaking down barriers and building agency and possibility, using the connectivity of the web.

I think this matters now, immensely. After a decade and more of monetization and enclosure of the open web, so-called artificial intelligence threatens to make obsolete the hyperlinks and search capacities that structure a traceable web of knowledge. Instead, we are faced with a mass trawling ground where information and disinformation are not clearly distinguishable, and wherein credit for ideas – via copyright or Creative Commons (CC) license – has no reliable trace. Open, to me, is the only set of practices we have as a society that operates across the technical, social, and pedagogical fields that are being enclosed by vendors with AI products and practices to sell us...one of the few counters we have available to us to resist what Williamson (2023) calls the ‘PedagoGPT Complex.’

**Christian M. Stracke**  
**University of Bonn, Germany**

Openness in Education is important as never before: Drastic and unforeseeable changes are taking place in both education and the whole society. Some of the changes are happening slowly and gradually such as the commercialisation of public education and the influence that business and enterprises (would like to) take. Other changes emerged during the last years with the occurrence of the world wide web and the wide-spreading of new technologies such as online communities and so called “social media” (that are not social but only for profit): Fake news, shit storms, and propaganda are not only targeting individuals but also public education due to their impact on resilience, reliability and trust within teaching and learning. Furthermore, the sudden appearance of the COVID-19 pandemic with the lockdowns and closures of schools and universities has affected the public education in a non-preceding way: It led to quick and unprepared remote and online educational attempts that often failed. Currently, artificial intelligence is booming (Bozkurt et al., 2023) and will change public education even more than the COVID-19 pandemic as it will stay and cannot be removed (like the remote and online learning from COVID-19). At the moment, we are only catching a glimpse of the future changes that AI will cause in and for education and the whole society: In education, it will lead to the need of drastic changes such as different examinations (that cannot continue to be text-based and knowledge-oriented) and learning objectives (that need to focus (much more) on critical thinking and reflections).

Openness in Education has already proven its value and advantages during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns as presented in several studies (Stracke et al., 2022a; Stracke et al., 2022b). And, it will become even more important due to the aforementioned required drastic changes. Open Education as multi-dimensional philosophy and strategy can facilitate and support teaching and learning for all worldwide: It covers the design, development, implementation and evaluation of innovative educational concepts and learning processes as well as their sharing, re-using and adapting as open and free approaches. Together with an open and free licence, they are called OER that can foster teaching and learning in a distance and in all global regions that are currently without any educational offers. Furthermore, it can reduce costs and resources required for public education, namely for the teachers as well as for the educational institutions and systems.

I believe that Openness in Education can and will be a game changer in global application, not only but in particular against the drastic changes in education and society. Opening-up education will improve the educational conditions and especially the competences and mindsets of teachers and students due to the provided opportunities for educational innovations, critical reflections and competence developments within the whole society.

**Alan Tait**

**The Open University (UK), United Kingdom**

The term ‘open’ in education has enormous importance to me personally as it has dominated my entire professional career. It is good to have the opportunity here to reflect in its work as a rhetorical device, and in particular whether it has been grounded in liberatory practice that has changed lives for the better, or has been a naive set of practices that have changed little.

For me openness is constructed on two poles. The first is based on inclusion, democratisation and social justice, so a socio-political goal. The second, and related in complex ways, is about learner centred practice, so an educational goal.

The term was, I believe, first brought into the educational arena by the Open University U.K., established in 1969. The world of Higher Education had in the U.K. until the 1960’s been dominated by exclusion not openness, with some 5% only of school leavers continuing to university. The culture of exclusion was based significantly round social class, with gender and age also playing a very dominant role. The Open University drove a huge revolution in cultural attitudes, with students choosing the university rather than the other way round – women and men, older adult students rather than school leavers, and a much wider range of social and economic backgrounds. The revolution in thinking about who university was for was led by a strong commitment to social justice, the inclusion of those who had been hitherto excluded. Less explicitly but also importantly, the move from elite to more democratic notions of Higher Education was also driven by the understanding that society needed more and more of its members with higher levels of knowledge and skills for a more complex and fast moving world. The democratisation of Higher Education has since the 1970s developed in all regions of the world, with some 80 open universities playing a central role.

The second dimension was built on learner centred practice, building a respect for the needs of students into the culture of the organisation, operationalised through a range of flexible practices that recognised the life contexts of students.

Since that initial phase the term open as a rhetorical device has continued to evolve and develop in ways that have maintained its centrality to both social justice and economic development.

The 1980s saw open learning gain profile as the term that gained over distance education, at least in the U.K. it was applied creatively to a range of dimensions, not only geographical reach and admissions policy, but also learner centred flexibility of study patterns, curriculum paths and assessment modes. During the 1990s the digital revolution sparked new modes of openness, including OER that could be shared and adapted, as well as open publishing practices in fields such as academic journals, as well as open source software for learning management platforms. Openness during the 2000s saw an ambitious push back against the commoditisation that the digital revolution seemed to promote, with the language of open and free promoting a ‘commons’ that was in sharp contrast with the proprietary and branded approach to digital products and services.

So does the concept of Openness in Education retain its vitality as a movement of innovation in education, in particular firstly with regard to inclusion, social justice and social and economic development for all, and secondly with regard to learner centred practice? I would suggest that we can look with pleasure at the ways in which conventional campus-based systems have borrowed from the cultures and practices of institutions that aspire to openness. At the same time we have to be aware that the progressive trends of the 1960’s and 1970’s have in many parts of the world given way to more market based social policy, dominated by commercialism and commoditisation. Openness remains then a social, political and educational aspiration for the 21st century worth struggling for. Let’s keep at it!

**Ahmed Tlili**

**Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University, China**

Openness is considered a key factor in education because it can help to achieve inclusivity, where education is not limited “anymore” to those who are financially stable, and can pay to purchase or access some learning content, including textbooks. Additionally, openness allows, for instance, the possibility of reusing and remixing educational resources, hence facilitating meeting the needs of students with disabilities in order to increase their accessibilities and

e-inclusion capabilities in educational settings. Consequently, all people regardless of their differences or financial status can possibly access educational resources and learn, even in rural areas where they are suffering from lack of educational resources.

Moreover, openness can promote quality education, where educational resources can be revisited, revised or remixed to be enhanced, updated or adopted according to a given educational context or setting. Beyond resource creation, openness can also promote innovation in education. For instance, in terms of pedagogy, the use of open pedagogy allows students to be co-creators of the teaching content, and the use of open assessment or open collaboration allow teachers to be more as facilitators instead of having the traditional role of being only teachers. This can further contribute to sustainable education as the instant and easy access to resources and tools can help to maintain education even if the lessons are stopped in schools (e.g., crises). This was seen, for instance, during the COVID-19 where several universities worldwide relied on open education to maintain learning from home.

Finally, harnessing the power of openness like open data, open algorithms, etc. can allow developing responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, hence providing safe and transparent AI tools and systems in education. In terms of tools, open-source tools and software like the learning management system Moodle allows various educational researchers to use it and further implement various plugins and blocks depending on their needs (for instance to detect at-risk students) which make the learning process smarter and more effective.

### **George Ubachs**

#### **European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), the Netherlands**

Open education is crucial because it removes barriers to education and makes it accessible to everyone. It is provided without significant entry requirements, using flexible teaching and learning methods, and at no or low cost. Open education allows people to benefit from a high-quality learning experience wherever they are, whether at home or at work.

The goal of open education is to empower learners for upskilling or reskilling for their career development or to become informed and responsible citizens. To achieve this on a large scale with high quality and at an affordable cost, digital teaching and learning must be used to meet the needs of the economy and society as well as the personal needs of learners in an increasingly complex world.

As open education is part of universities' third mission, universities should take proactive measures to facilitate access by not only removing barriers but also actively opening up their offerings by creating platforms or portals, accommodating people, and guiding them to open learning opportunities that match their personal interests and needs. Digitalisation can support these processes. To make this happen, higher education institutions need to develop policies for continuing education and lifelong learning in general.

Organising open education also contributes to the modernisation of higher education. It has an impact on the quality of degree programs in higher education institutions by integrating materials into these programs and changing the teaching and learning models and culture. At the inter-institutional level, this has already been observed in countries where the presence of an open university has had a definite influence on teaching and learning in traditional universities.

### **Joshua Weidlich**

#### **DIPF – Leibniz-Institute for Research and Information in Education, Germany**

For my testimony, I will address a very different type of openness, one that is no less critical for the success of education, albeit more indirectly. Here, I am speaking of education as an empirical field of research, which, in order to inform educational practice, must be both highly-applied yet also rigorous. The type of openness I want to highlight here is an openness to think causally, to speak of cause-and-effect, and to attempt causal inference. If we as researchers and educators want to have a positive impact on education we must not shy away from causality in thinking, speaking, and doing. Only then can educational research generate robust causal knowledge. Among the many reasons why causal knowledge is important, I want to emphasize just two here.

First, any good theory of how learning happens is inherently causal. Whereas learning is described by changes in mental states, which must be caused by something, teaching –even more obvious– is about effecting change in the students through different means. However, these fundamental causal requirements are often not reflected in pedagogical theory. Why this is a problem can be seen in an instant when considering Kurt Lewin's (1943) claim that “there is nothing as practical as a good theory”. Arguably, this can only be true when our theory includes a causal agent, something that can be identified to have set into motion the processes that ultimately affect learning. Even when attempting to find refuge in doing descriptive work, we cannot escape. This is because the world we aim to describe is itself an exceedingly complex system of causes and effects. Until our theories reflect this truth, we must demonstrate humbleness toward the causal limitations of our theoretical scholarship.

Second, as an applied field, we want our empirical research to yield practical implications, to ultimately improve learning and teaching. That is, we have an urgent need for robust causal knowledge emerging from research. Why then do researchers choose not to speak of causes in vast chunks of the research literature? Aware of the truism that correlations do not equal causation and lest their causal claims be obstacles in the peer-review process, non-experimental research hides behind euphemisms and speaks of prediction, relationship, association. However, when the unavoidable time arrives to provide recommendations, this hesitancy must disappear, lest their research to be found lacking in educational relevance. To be clear, this is not a plea for exclusive experimentation in education. There are many good reasons to conduct non-experimental research. Yet, the missing link here is, again, openness. Openness to speak of causal research needs, of wagering causal implications, and of admitting causal limitations.

Today, we have an increasingly large toolset for causal thinking, communicating causal claims, and attempting causal inferences in our research. A particularly accessible example are Directed Acyclic Graphs, or simply, causal graphs. Making use of these toolsets should, in my opinion, no longer be optional to contribute meaningfully to education and educational research.

**Martin Weller**

**The Open University (UK), United Kingdom**

The function of education and research is sharing knowledge. Openness reminds us of this fundamental purpose of education, which is continually obscured by issues around commerce, rights, profitability, and exploitation. We become educators because we want to create and share knowledge – openness is the most effective means to realise this.

**Junhong Xiao**

**Open University of Shantou/Shantou Radio and Television University, China**

Education is a universally acknowledged human right. In other words, everyone has the right to education, regardless of gender, age, race, religion, socio-economic status, nationality, and so on. The only way to ensure equitable access to education for all is openness in education. Open and distance education (ODE) is an epitome of openness in education. According to the official statistics released by the Chinese Ministry of Education ([http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_sjzl/sjzl\\_fztjgb/202209/t20220914\\_660850.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_fztjgb/202209/t20220914_660850.html)), ODE enrolment represented around 15% of the total university enrolment and ODE graduates accounted for 18% of the total population of university graduates in China in 2021. As for China's dedicated ODE institution – the Open University of China, it produced 15.59 million graduates in addition to providing professional development programs for over one hundred million job-holders from all walks of life from 1978 to 2020. Further, over 50% of its students live and work in the less developed areas. These numbers speak for themselves and the importance of openness is self-evident. Of course, Openness in Education is not limited to ODE programs or ODE institutions. Nevertheless, all forms of openness (should) share one thing in common: promoting and facilitating equitable access to quality education.

We are now living in a rapidly-evolving digital age. Things are changing so fast that one has to learn new knowledge and skills almost all the time. Against this backdrop, Openness in Education is even more imperative. Unless education is open to all, the haves will have more while the have nots will have even less. Existing gaps will widen and new gaps will emerge, in a word, exacerbating inequality and inequity in all aspects of society. To bridge these gaps, we



need to ensure that access to quality education is not merely a vision or possibility but a reality. There should be no obstacle, be it individual or institutional, to one's access to education. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that digitalization is a double-edged sword. It can contribute to opening up education as well as closing the door to education. Over-reliance on digital technologies is tantamount to walling education off from the less advantaged instead of facilitating equitable access for all. Therefore, there should be a spectrum of modalities for open education, ranging from the most cutting-edge technology-supported to low technology-enhanced to no technology option, in order to cater for all.

**Olaf Zawacki-Richter**  
**University of Oldenburg, Germany**

We live in very dynamic times. The digital transformation is permeating all areas of our societies around the world. It offers enormous opportunities, but can also be frightening. Any technology can be used for good or evil. Free access to knowledge and education is of enormous importance for a mature and emancipated understanding of innovations for free, democratic societies.

It is important to understand the limitations and risks that can arise from this. At the same time, the global challenges and changes have never been as great as they are today: digitalization, climate change, wars and destruction. If there is hope, it is only through education and enlightenment through truth, evidence, science and honesty. To quote Nelson Mandela: Education is the most powerful weapon...

The earth, and nature will survive and recover. The only question is whether we can survive as a human civilization.

I come from the tradition of Open and Distance Learning (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). In the context of digitalisation, I describe the field as Open, Distance, and Digital Education (ODDE, see: Zawacki-Richter & Jung, 2023). I am very pleased to see that the global community is growing and advocating for an Open Educational Practice. As a scientist and scholar, this is my research subject. However, now at a somewhat advanced stage in my career, I would also like to support as an administrator for Open Education to make a difference. I feel this opportunity is a great privilege to be able to push things forward in this direction.

## DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

All data generated or analysed during this study, that is testimonies, are included in this published collective editorial. By citing this paper properly, other researchers can use testimonies as a data set.

## ETHICS AND CONSENT

Since the researchers in this study reported their own testimonies and used their own experiences as a data source, an ethics review is waived in this collective editorial.

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We pay tribute to Turkish poet and Sufi mystic Yunus Emre (1238-1320) who, centuries ago, emphasised the value of openness by saying "what you share is yours, not what you gather."

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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
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