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# Open in the evening: openings and closures in an ecology of practices

*Leo Havemann*

## Introduction

Versions and interpretations of 'openness' currently abound, such that it is said to have become "one of the central contested values of modern liberal society" (Peters, 2014, p. 1). Contemporary products and practices that are said to be open are often also the subjects of advocacy by a range of self-described *movements* for open source software, open science, open government, open access, open data, and open education. These "opening" movements tend to operate (somewhat counter-intuitively) as *silos* of practice within particular professional communities (Atenas & Havemann, 2015; Campbell, 2015). On the surface, their connecting thread is that they make a common claim on behalf of openness as a worthy value, yet they also share a significant but less explicit commitment to distinctly *digital* forms of openness.

The notion of the digital-as-enabler has underwritten current discussions of open education, which have tended to focus on the provision of digital content, such as open educational resources (OER), and massive open online courses (MOOCs). Yet, "opening moves" in education also have a pre-digital history. In a variety of contexts, attempts have been made to reposition education as both public good and human right, and to democratise educational access and participation beyond the privileged strata of society, thereby enhancing opportunities for social and economic participation, for the working class, women and other traditionally underserved groups (Brennan, 2016; Jordan & Weller, 2017; Longstaff, 2014; Peter & Deimann, 2013; Peters, Gietzen, & Ondercin, 2012; Rolfe, 2017; Weller et al, 2018).

Recently a critical turn has emerged in the open education literature. In addition to voices which have critiqued open education as under-theorised (Bayne, Knox & Ross, 2015; Edwards, 2015; Gourlay, 2015; Knox, 2013; Oliver, 2015; Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012), another strand has called upon scholars and practitioners to refocus their attention on open educational *practices* (OEP). From this perspective, open forms of education (like education in general) are framed as a range of processes undertaken by human beings, rather than consisting specifically in the resources they create or amend. This framing appears to offer the possibility of deeper insights into actual practices, but whereas the forms of openness afforded by OER or MOOCs are well understood, it is less obvious what exactly makes a *practice* open. However, this inherent ambiguity might be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness of OEP: while much of the literature discussing OEP has framed the concept in relation to OER, there is a more expansive concept of OEP which recognises other forms of openness and ways of opening (Havemann, 2016; Cronin, 2017; Cronin & MacLaren, 2018; Roberts et al, 2018).

Taking its cue from this line of enquiry, this chapter considers the question of what is open about (or opened by) open education, and how the concept of OEP can potentially aid this investigation. It focuses on a case study of practice at Birkbeck, University of London, which is an institution of higher education that itself grew out of a particular instance of opening almost 200 years ago. The case study will illustrate the senses in which Birkbeck, along with the particular case of practice under study, is characterised by an interplay of openings and closures.

## Opening moves in education

‘Open education’ often carries the weight of describing not just policy, practices, resources, curricula and pedagogy, but also the values inherent within these, as well as relationships between teachers and learners. So is open education a slogan or a philosophy, a metaphor, model, or movement? (Cronin & MacLaren, 2018, p. 127)

The polyvalence of the term *open* has afforded it wide applicability in contemporary culture but also introduced a significant degree of ambiguity (Pomerantz & Peek, 2016). The application of this label suggests, but cannot in itself define, a worthy, positive goal. The actual nature of openness remains somewhat slippery. Indeed, Tkacz (2012) argues that forms of closure are both inherent to, and inevitably (re)produced by opening movements; consequently, he questions the utility of openness as concept, if not as rhetoric:

All these individuals and groups understand their practices and ideas in relation to the open and use it to ‘look forward’. [But] the open has not proven well suited to this task. Rather than using the open to look forward, there is a need to look more closely at the specific projects that operate under its name.... To describe the political organisation of all things open requires leaving the rhetoric of open behind. (p. 404)

While the open education movement is unlikely to welcome a call to expunge the use of “open” from its discourse, it does appear that there is a troubling inconsistency in its application, and that the concept of openness warrants further investigation.

Certainly, in the higher education context, references to openness have recently proliferated, such that it is now differentiates apparently alternate versions of resources, courses, educators, and even practices. But before the turn of the millennium, mention of “open education” or “open learning” might very likely have called to mind an institution such as The Open University in the UK, Athabasca University in Canada, or UNISA in South Africa. Such institutions arose from a social mission to open up access to higher education study and qualifications, making use of distance and distributed education modes to reach students who either could not attend campus-based education at the places and times offered, or who lacked traditional entry qualifications (Peters, Gietzen, & Ondercin, 2012). The Open University is “open” primarily in the sense that it seeks to extend the benefits of higher education to students who otherwise would not be served by the sector. Yet this university itself acknowledges and even celebrates the ambiguity of openness in its mission statement, which declares: “The Open University’s mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas” (Open University, n.d).

Of late, a discursive shift appears to have introduced a markedly different notion of openness, which has quite rapidly become central to discussions of open education, and which is afforded through the granting of access to openly licensed or freely available digital content, delivered in the form of OER (including open textbooks), or MOOCs. Without discounting the value of such practices, it has been argued that in the process, openness is said to have “acquired a sheen of naturalised common sense and legitimacy, and formed what seems to be a post-political space of apparent consensus” (Bayne, Knox, & Ross, 2015, p. 247). If open has become a value which is “battled for,” whether because or in spite of its unstable meaning (Weller, 2014), it appears critical to interrogate the work that the label “open” does in various contexts.

As Watters (2017) notes, stories and “histories” can play a key cultural role as explanatory frameworks which account for how present conditions came about. Silicon Valley’s educational technology narratives tend to be shaped in terms of the transformative and “disruptive” roles technology has when acting upon education. At times in such histories (even when versions of them are taken up by champions of technology within institutions), education tends to be presented (along with the help of recurring motifs such as “the Victorian classroom”) as a conservative, essentially unchanging domain, lacking its own vision or drive to innovate.

While it is crucial not to confuse the goals of open educators with those which drive technology companies, it is noteworthy that open education narratives have tended to somewhat uncritically adopt a similar notion of the ‘coming of the digital’ as the great enabler and game-changer. Thus, accounts of open education’s history tend to emphasise the dual influences of both the open access and free and open source software movements. It is also usual to highlight the decision by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to release large volumes of its learning resources as “open courseware” as a model for the provision of open, modifiable educational materials in digital formats, leading to the coining of the phrase ‘open educational resources’ by UNESCO (2002). Such influences and milestones are of undeniable significance, and yet, strangely, until recently there appears to have been less discussion of the educational antecedents of today’s digitally-focused open education movement, as if somehow education itself has contributed little to this project. In presenting a vision of educational openness that is necessarily digital, the existence of a necessarily *analogue and closed* opposite is implied, and while some practices appear widely accepted as legitimate exemplars of open education, while others are rarely discussed under this banner.

To describe something as being open is to rhetorically contrast it with that which is closed; perhaps even to raise a spectre of *closed-ness*, that only openness can exorcise. In essence, open movements, almost by definition, suggest that one must be *for* openness and, *against* closed-ness. Yet, open is not, after all, the true opposite of closed; rather, open indicates some degree of difference from closed. On closer inspection, openness is better understood a matter of degree or quality, rather than one half of a binary. The issues created by the apparent binary have not escaped the notice of the OER movement. Wiley (2009), for example, argues that openness is better understood as continuous. This conception of openness can be illustrated by the example of a door, which can be either open or closed, but where openness indicates many available degrees on a continuum. This continuum model certainly makes sense in the specific case of OER, which can be *more or less openly licensed* (for reuse or repurposing) depending on the permissions granted by the creator, but it fails to account adequately for exemplars which are *differently* open.

MOOCs provide a salient example of a different form of openness. The main stream of MOOCs (sometimes known as “xMOOCs”), can be characterised as content-driven online courses (as opposed to the community-driven emphasis of the original “cMOOCs”) (Weller, 2014). While MOOCs are therefore a form of “open” digital content, their openness is often primarily one of enrolment - the learning materials contained within the MOOC platform may not be openly licensed (or, indeed, openly available, as one must typically register on the platform and enrol on the course). While some might consequently argue that MOOCs are not open, it is more accurate to say that their openness is different in form from the openness of OER (Czerniewicz et al., 2017). A MOOC typically creates an open opportunity for potential learners to enrol, to peruse the learning materials, to complete assessments, often to interact with other participants, and in some cases even to gain a degree of support in this process from facilitators. Yet this opportunity is nonetheless evidently also closed in certain other ways. It is closed to those who do not have reliable access to a device or connection that supports the use of the online platform, and it remains no less closed to those who have not yet gained the necessary levels of digital, language or academic skills to navigate, interact or learn within that environment. If one can surmount these barriers, the MOOC is open to be studied, but there can be further elements of closure. Those students who additionally wish or need to evidence their participation often must pay for a certificate, and after the MOOC ends, those who have not paid may not retain access to the course resources unless they have been made available or openly licensed for downloading, reuse or repurposing in other contexts. Attempting to determine whether MOOCs are less or more open than OER on a continuum appears futile; such cases evidence qualitatively different forms of openness, which are different again from the openness of an open university.

Adding nuance to this grey area: much of the discussion of openness has understandably focused on the modern phenomena of open courses, resources and universities, which have explicitly sought to appropriate the open label. Yet moves to widen educational access and participation can be traced back to the Middle Ages, and seen to recur under different guises, suggesting that openness has been an ongoing feature of educational practices, past and present, but that those practices have taken context-specific shapes (Peter & Deimann, 2013). Furthermore, alternate forms of openness continue to operate, for example in the sharing and reuse of resources “without a licence” by educators who may be primarily concerned with the availability and applicability of resources, rather than with their legal openness (Amiel & Soares, 2016; Veletsianos, 2015). For Amiel and Soares (2016), there are two contrasting notions of “the commons” in play: the legal versus the social.

While the sharing of unlicensed resources may not officially constitute engagement with OER, this can nonetheless be described as an open educational practice. Indeed, such practices would seem to be explicitly included under an open education umbrella by the Cape Town Open Education Declaration (2007), which stated:

open education is not limited to just open educational resources. It also draws upon open technologies that facilitate collaborative, flexible learning and the open sharing of teaching practices that empower educators to benefit from the best ideas of their colleagues. It may also grow to include new approaches to assessment, accreditation and collaborative learning. Understanding and embracing innovations like these is critical to the long term vision of this movement.

The Cape Town declaration marked the beginning of a trend towards discussion of open education as a wider-than-OER set of “practices”, which would be followed up by OEP definitions such as the following: “practices which *support the (re)use and production of OER* through institutional policies, *promote innovative pedagogical models*, and *respect and empower learners as co-producers* on their *lifelong learning path*” (Andrade et al., 2011, p. 12, emphasis added). In this definition, OEP is positioned as inclusive of OER-openness (i.e., content that is openly licensed), but also as addressing aspirations to other *opens*, thereby encompassing a wider and more nebulous remit. This wider remit of OEP, untethered from a specific interpretation of open, is understood here to approach questions of pedagogic innovation, of educational power relations and empowerment, and also of the notion of lifelong (and perhaps we might add, life-wide) learning. This very “open” definition of OEP consequently reconnects contemporary discussions of digital resources and practices with the values of open universities and suggests that education should neither be restricted to the young, nor focused solely on employment. OEP, understood in this way, has roots in OER, but also in networked, participatory scholarship and learning communities (Cronin, 2017; Cronin & MacLaren, 2018; Masterman, 2016; Nascimbeni and Burgos, 2016). These other open practices are sometimes likely understood by educators primarily as something else (blogging, social networking), rather than as “OEP” or as something done in the name of openness.

While perhaps an emerging consensus now accepts that OEP encompasses a range of practices which act to open aspects of education, at the same time a kind of “digital divide” persists. It appears that analogue forms of educational practice often tend to be regarded as self-evidently “closed” - either unrelated to today’s digital open practices or recognised only for ancestral roles. It is understandable that scholars and practitioners of digital education are particularly interested in digital content and practice, but this collapsing of open into digital is problematic. In addition to failing to account for multiple senses of open, it may unhelpfully serve to promote a perception of open education as something that occurs only within a particular silo of digitally-driven learning and teaching, thereby alienating colleagues who might be aligned, but focused elsewhere (such as widening participation or developing academic literacies).

Once an educational history is re-infused into the concept of openness, it becomes clear that openness does not simply flow inevitably from digitisation, and by implication, nor are analogue practices necessarily synonymous with closed-ness. As Edwards (2015) suggests, we must proceed from an understanding that educational “openings” inevitably entail “closures”:

Different educational practices involve ... the interplay of openness and closed-ness which can be examined empirically. This is the case for all practices, whether face-to-face or digital. Initiatives to open education through the use of digital technologies therefore reconfigure rather than simply overcome the interplay of open-closed-ness. This is not to say that these initiatives cannot be beneficial, but they will be selectively so, as is the case with all educational practices. ... An important question therefore becomes not simply whether education is more or less open, but what forms of openness are worthwhile and for whom. (p. 253)

This conception of an interplay of open and closed elements occurring across all instances of practice creates the possibility of a more holistic vision of practitioners, practices, and the spaces in which

education takes place. Rather than casting the university as simply a site of traditional “closed” education, it might perhaps be better understood as a complex ecology of practices. For Nardi and O'Day (1999) information ecologies are “systems of people, practices, values, and technologies in a particular local environment” (p. 49). In an information ecology, systems and subsystems operate interdependently, supporting species diversity in different niches; keystone species are critical to the wider ecology; and as the ecology changes and evolves, species migrate in and out, and co-evolve (Nardi & O'Day, 1999). Drawing upon this model, Thorne (2016) argues that the open education movement has “catalysed a revitalization of new developments within both open and for-profit educational sectors”. This notion can also be applied at the level of the individual institution, in which alternative learning and teaching modes may co-exist, occupying specific niches. Through this frame, a university is an ecology in which digital and analogue, and “open” and “closed” educational practices may well co-exist in interdependent, complementary ways rather than being positioned in opposition to each other.

## Stepping up: a case study

The complexity of openings and closures can be illustrated through examining a case study of practice within an institution which can be understood as at once, traditional, analogue and “closed” in its emphasis on face-to-face mode teaching - and yet which perhaps should be understood as the UK's original “open university”. This institution came into existence almost 200 years ago with the establishment of the London Mechanics Institute, by Dr George Birkbeck in 1823, and was later renamed Birkbeck College, before becoming popularly known as Birkbeck, University of London. While the college has evolved through numerous changes over the decades, it continues its original mission of making higher education available in the evening, in order to cater for an otherwise disenfranchised group of typically mature and part-time students who work during the day: a practice decried at the time as “spreading the seeds of evil” (Birkbeck, University of London, n.d.).

Birkbeck, as an institution, might be described as largely untroubled by the modern-day, digitally-driven open education movement, but certainly emerged out of, and continues to pursue, an opening mission. Birkbeck is a university which is, quite literally, open in the evening. While this is quite a very specific form of openness, it is nonetheless a form. Unlike institutions which run classes during conventional business hours or asynchronously as distance learning providers, Birkbeck's historic approach openness recognises that many people who might wish to be students are at work during the day but may still prefer to attend face-to-face classes (notwithstanding the recent transformation to a default blended mode of provision supported by the digital content and platforms). Lower entry qualification thresholds compared with those at surrounding London institutions also act to enable access for a high proportion of mature and non-traditional students, as well as a substantial population of postgraduates who are often returning to study after many years away.

Of course, attending classes in the centre of London on weekday evenings is neither the only possible route to participation in higher education for such students, nor is it an option that is open to everyone. Birkbeck's evening students could instead opt for fully-online programmes (probably provided by other institutions), which would obviate the need for attendance at face-to-face classes.

For a variety of reasons, though, the majority of Birkbeck students prefer to time-shift their attendance at face-to-face classes into a slice of the day between six and nine p.m. - a time usually reserved for eating dinner, spending time with partners and friends, putting children to bed, working late, commuting home, or Netflix. The sacrifices involved in giving up such normal activities and bearing the significant costs of study in England suggest that these students value this face-to-face element, and survey results confirm that Birkbeck students rate the quality of their teaching highly.

In this context, face-to-face teaching in the evening has been seen and celebrated as the college's 'unique selling proposition'. Nonetheless, Birkbeck's digital education activity has quietly gone mainstream. Most modules<sup>1</sup> taught at Birkbeck now incorporate elements of online support or interaction, typically through Moodle and integrated services, so it could be said that 'blended learning' is already the norm; even so, Birkbeck modules have tended to remain face-to-face-centric, with supporting materials or assessment administration handled online. Unlike other institutions which have pursued digital delivery as a means to broaden enrolments beyond the immediate geographic area, at Birkbeck fully-online and online-led modules have remained the preserve of a small number of specific programmes. In between the face-to-face-centric and the fully-online modules, there has been a mostly vacant ecological niche for online-led modules which contain face-to-face elements.

In 2012, with a view to investigating the potential of online-led blended learning, a cross-college group initiated a project in two phases. The group wished first of all to develop a generic, flexible, blended learning design compatible with Birkbeck's approach to teaching and student support. The second phase would involve the development of a pilot module, which would become known as "Step Up to Postgraduate Study in Arts" (henceforth referred to as Step Up), and which would enable a trial run of the generic design. In doing so, the group also sought to address an issue of wider concern in the college at the time of the project's commencement, which was the recruitment, retention and success of students in postgraduate programmes. While acceptance into a postgraduate programme might usually be taken as an assurance of graduate-level academic capabilities, in practice many incoming Birkbeck postgraduates are returning to study after long breaks, while at the same time attempting to balance the demands of study with significant work and family commitments. Academic skills training for potential or accepted (but still pre-sessional) postgraduates was identified in the bid as a gap in existing provision, and addressing this gap appeared to offer a potential route to support recruitment, retention and achievement.

The team applied and were awarded several days of support from two consultants and during the first half of 2013 the project team met regularly. Discussions focused on the educational possibilities enabled by digital learning technologies, as well as the common or typical features of education at Birkbeck, and the needs and expectations of Birkbeck's diverse student population. The team were keenly aware of there being a difference between the values that underpin a Birkbeck education (which might be described as "open") and a typical approach to teaching at Birkbeck. While evening face-to-face classes might be perceived as core to the experience, students also already tended to rely upon the use of the virtual learning environment to support delivery of learning materials, such as digitised readings and lecture slides. Coursework components, particularly assessment, marking

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<sup>1</sup> In the United Kingdom, a single unit of study that contributes a specified number of credits towards a qualification is usually known as a "module", whereas the term "course" might refer to an entire programme of study, such as a degree or diploma.



and feedback, had become increasingly digital. Birkbeck students should not therefore be construed as opposed to the online, so much as devotees of the face-to-face. The project team were nonetheless wary of how a student who deliberately opts for a face-to-face-led programme would respond to the 'unexpected' inclusion of an online-led module, especially given that this would form a pre-sessional introduction to studying at the college.

Although aware and somewhat inspired by the pervasive “MOOC mania” of the moment, the project team did not set out to create a massive, open, or fully-online course. It was felt that opening the module beyond the target group of Birkbeck’s own incoming postgraduates would present too great a challenge in terms of limited staffing resources to communicate with participants and mark submissions, which were judged as necessary features of the supportive experience the team were aiming to offer. Therefore, the module was designed to be free to invited participants rather than open, and mostly but not fully online, with face-to-face events launching and closing the module and acting as bookends of the study period. The guiding principle of the model’s development was therefore *flexibility*, rather than openness, which as Oliver (2015) notes, “has also been used to question the forms and practices of Higher Education and has arguably generated better-developed insights” (p. 369). The team drew on their own experiences of teaching and supporting learning at Birkbeck, as well as the expertise of the consultants, in order to frame some guiding principles of a bespoke flexible, blended approach:

- Class time is limited, and therefore is to be used carefully, mostly for interactive, community-building activities; information provision in class will be kept to a minimum, and all key information must be accessible online.
- Content delivery, self-access learning activities, and assessments can be accessed and completed online, asynchronously, in the order and at the pace of student’s choosing.
- Multiple “assessment opportunities” rather than a deadline will be provided, in order to support Assessment for Learning principles.
- The online environment should be designed to foster both reflection and interaction (e.g. through synchronous online events, as well as forums and journals).

The module first opened for students in July 2013, and thus far, has run again each subsequent summer. During the original run, members of the project team presented a conference workshop entitled “Special Blend”, highlighting the ways in which a version of blended learning had been configured to work in the particular context of Birkbeck and its diverse student body (Havemann et al., 2013). Here, the team drew upon the typical, rather vague notion of “blended” as indicating a mix of analogue and digital elements (Dziuban et al., 2018; Oliver & Trigwell, 2005). Yet the module might also be understood as blended in the sense of its blending of openness and closed-ness. Step Up is a taught module rather than an OER or a MOOC, and although the module does make use of OER from Birkbeck and elsewhere, its openness might appear dubious through the usual frames of open licensing or massiveness. However, when examined through the lens of OEP, it is possible to see that educational spaces are opened in the learning and teaching of Step Up.

For Pomerantz and Peek (2016), *open* is used to stand in for a wide range of distinct concepts. One of the most salient for this discussion is the notion of *open as participatory*. Where acknowledged barriers to participation in an educational context exist (for example, formal higher education programmes which charge fees or require entry qualifications), then these contexts can tend to be

classified as 'closed' within the rhetoric of open education. Alternatively, OER and MOOCs are considered to widen the circle of participation, as access to them is free of charge. However, the implication that the ability to engage in OER reuse or MOOC-based learning is universal is problematic and elides the difference between access to learning materials and "education" (Gourlay, 2015; Knox, 2013). Even leaving aside the disappearance of the teacher within such models, in order to access OER or participate in a MOOC, a learner requires digital devices and connectivity, coupled with a range of pre-existing literacies. The preponderance of English as a supposedly sufficient *lingua franca* for a global open education also belies universality.

The qualifying threshold of openness therefore surely cannot be a requirement to enable 100% access, let alone participation, even if this could actually be possible. The provision of freely accessible or modifiable learning materials represent a public good, even if such materials cannot claim or reasonably be expected to achieve universal reach. Thus, while a move towards openness may enlarge the circle of participation, it does not eliminate this boundary altogether which continues to both include and exclude. This suggests that acting to widen participation while recognising or imposing a particular set of limitations, is actually a normal, rather than aberrant, condition of openness.

In light of this, the case of Step Up is perhaps less closed than it might first appear. There are barriers to participation, in that students must be intending to enrol in a postgraduate programme at Birkbeck, but the module itself is free of charge. Keeping the module focused on the target group, rather than offering it as a MOOC, lowers the quantity of participation but arguably enables a more impactful experience for those who do participate, as this allows a small team of educators to interact online with the participants, give personal feedback on their assessments, and run face-to-face events.

Indeed, rather than operating from an assumption that more participants and higher levels of participation are always desirable, Step Up deliberately calls on students to participate only to the extent that they find productive or are able. In designing an optional, non-credit-bearing module to be studied over the summer, the team were concerned not to place unreasonable demands on students' time. Instead they are encouraged to engage selectively, in the order they choose. Self-assessment quizzes are designed to give an indicative sense of the student's prior knowledge of the topic of each learning unit. Students are encouraged to complete the marked assessments they find challenging in order to benefit from feedback, rather than target activities they are confident they can do. As such, the module might be described as less participatory than others where there is more compulsion and structure, but can also be understood, in keeping with some definitions of OEP, as empowering students to structure a personal pathway through the learning activities, with a view to the enhancement of skills but also the development of learner autonomy and independence which will be key to success in their postgraduate studies.

A further element of participation is students' active engagement in feeding back their experience of the module via the online 'reflection room' or social forum, as well as during the final face-to-face event. From the outset, the team presented Step Up as a work in progress; an experimental and evolving module which invited students as collaborators. Interestingly, the most frequent critique of the module has been to point out that no one realistically has time to complete all the material provided.

The openness of Step Up has also been evidenced in the commitment of the original team to share this evolving form of practice with colleagues, through workshops, invited talks and informal conversations, and through granting access to past iterations of the module. While the module itself has been successful in attracting a good proportion of those entering postgraduate programmes in Birkbeck's School of Arts over the past six summers, it has taken time for the flexible blended design it is based upon to propagate, but it is now evolving into different forms both within and outside of the original niche. Slowly but surely, this interest has grown, and elements of the approach have become more widely adopted, including the emergence of a sibling module, "Step In to Undergraduate Study in Arts" and a cousin, "Step Up to Postgraduate Study in Business."

The intention in presenting this short case study has not been to claim that Step Up represents a cutting-edge innovation in the field of digital education, or that it necessarily pushes at the boundaries of openness. Instead the case study highlights that Step Up is remarkable in having taken root within a particular institutional ecology, one which can be understood as 'already open' in its mission to serve a non-traditional student community, but in which a blended, mostly online mode of learning and teaching has struggled to find a supportive niche in which to flourish. Step Up has finally established itself within the wider ecology and demonstrated that open practices can invite the migration of pedagogies as well as resources to new niches.

## Conclusion

This chapter has questioned aspects of the rhetoric of the open education movement rather than the valuable work it does. Freely accessible and modifiable learning materials and free (even low-cost) online courses are public goods, even if they can neither claim - nor reasonably be expected - to achieve universal reach. However, in addition to generating these evident outputs, the open education movement has played a crucial role in "re-opening" the discussions about what it means to describe some aspect of education as *open*. The recent turn to practices, in particular, offers a critical lens through which to examine opening moves in education.

The purpose of the case study presented, similarly, was not to argue that Step Up to Postgraduate Study in Arts is any more or less open than an OER or a MOOC, but rather to question the utility of such claims. In rejecting a binary, either/or model of open and closed practices as oversimplified, neither should we readily accept the notion of a more/less continuum between these two poles. Instead, as we work toward a theory of open educational practices, it may be most productive to conceive of instances of educational practice as always *both/and*, deriving from an interplay of open and closed elements.

Language evolves and gains meaning in use; it is therefore perfectly legitimate to apply the label "open" to certain activities simply because they have become widely understood as such. Yet this should not be at the expense of other educational practices being unhelpfully labelled "closed." The close current association of the idea of openness with the digital allows a problematic slippage between digital and open, analogue and closed, which can lead to assumptions that simply embracing the digital is a sure pathway into a naturally and benevolently open future. Such techno-utopian tendencies now need to be tempered by observations that the wider social trend is

that digital technologies are providing the key route to open up and exploit new markets for profit, at times at the expense of citizen privacy and the reduction of complex social phenomena to mere data points, at the risk of algorithmic redlining, and perhaps of irreparable damage to an already fragile public sphere.

Rather than using the language of open to “look forward,” we might instead look to the present, imperfect world, and keep with us an awareness of the ways in which openings might harm as well as heal, and closures might protect as well as exclude. Simple binaries of closed and open, analogue and digital, where one half is always valorised, do not serve us well in navigating the choppy waters of contemporary education.

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