

Book Review

Conrad, D. & Prinsloo, P. (eds.). 2020. *Open(ing) Education: Theory and Practice*. Leiden Boston: Brill | Sense.

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Open(ing) Education: Theory and Practice is edited by Dianne Conrad and Paul Prinsloo. Drawing upon their own extensive engagement in this field, they have produced and edited a wonderfully diverse and comprehensive collection of authors with varying perspectives and experiences. In so doing, the book responds to the under theorisation of open education by offering very sophisticated and nuanced conceptualisations of open education across the different chapters and in mapping out its different forms. One of the strengths of the book is the different angles from which openness is explored. Throughout the book, the authors add flesh to the idea that open and closed education are not the binary opposites of one another and illustrate that opening education is an ongoing project that embodies a coexistence of different forms and practices.

The book is helpfully framed and introduced by the editors and then it is divided into three parts, each also with a short introduction. Part 1 comprises of four chapters which focus on 'Open in theory and concept' and introduces a range of nuanced theorisations. Part 2 and 3, which comprise of six chapters, each present case studies from several countries on different aspects of open education: Part 2, on 'Open in a learning world' and Part 3 on 'Open in application'.

Cronin begins Chapter 1 with a thought-provoking article that makes a case for critical and transformative approaches to understanding and practicing open education. Cronin presents the different critical approaches to openness and raises very important questions for reflecting on or critiquing openness. Some of these are: "who defines openness? Who is included and who is excluded when education is 'opened', and in what ways? To what extent, by whom, in what contexts, and in what ways do specific, open education initiatives achieve their stated aims of increasing access, fostering inclusivity, enhancing learning, developing capacity and agency, and empowering individuals, groups, and communities: if at all? Some of these questions are attended to in the rest of the chapters.

In Chapter Two, Robertson, et al. conceptualise openness from the point of the view of the development of the human and argue that open education should enable one to have a critical engagement with his/her environment/culture or tradition. From a different perspective, Ryan, in Chapter Three, draws on and develops the notion of limen which pertains to things that cannot be normally grasped or perceived 'as a productive sphere in which to think about the possibilities for open education' (2020: 67). Ryan makes use of an architectural analogy, of a building with glass walls, and argues that this space of openness is one which academics are particularly able to access, which gives them an inside and outside gaze, that should encourage creativity and the



adoption of pedagogies that meet the needs of learners. In Chapter four, Witthaus examines openness in relation to the discourse of marketisation in higher education. Witthaus highlights the tensions that academics encounter in having to work within open education values or principles such as collaboration and the requirements of market driven national policies. This tension between these two forces is illustrated through a comparative critical discourse analysis of the United Kingdom's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the Science for Policy report by the European Commission on opening up education.

In Chapter 5, Algers and Wals discuss how open education can help academics to address the sustainable development goals. They illustrate this through a case study of sustainable development of food systems and argue that open education ought to be understood as 'transformative sustainability-oriented open education', where the views of learners and marginalised communities can raise important social issues. In Chapter 6, Starr-Glass examines mentorship as a form of openness embedded in higher education's ecological system. Focusing on inclusion, Liyanagunawardena, et al. explore openness for people with disabilities, in Chapter 7. They use the idea of personas to highlight the role of context in producing hurdles to people with disabilities accessing open resources. The main message being that openness needs to be inclusive and the authors note that communities of learners can help in making open educational contents accessible.

In Chapter 8, Rouleau and Kalir use the concept of the social ecologies of learning, 'which are comprised of the people, places, technologies, and resources that educators access and connect with as they learn and develop their teaching practices' to examine the boundaries between open educational practices and private practices (2020: 169). They show how an understanding of this concept can enable educators to 'access and navigate public-private tensions and open their practices, becoming increasingly deprivatized' or open (2020: 170). In Chapter 9, on 'Openness in Context', Blaschke, et al. present case studies that show how Open Educational Resources (OER) and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) are manifested in open and distance learning institutions in different contexts in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. In the presentation of these case studies, the advantages and challenges of OER and PLAR, as well as best practices in achieving these, are highlighted. Following on from Blaschke, et al, Santosh's article (Chapter 10) examines openness in the context of open universities in India. The central message espoused in the chapter is that open universities need to foster a culture of openness and suggestions are offered regarding how this may be done at the policy, organisational and technical levels. The authors believe that an approach of transparency is essential to fostering openness.

Chapter 11 examines openness in the context of South-Mediterranean countries. A case study of an international cooperation project involving five partners from Europe and nine from the South-Mediterranean (S-M) region (Morocco, Palestine, Egypt, and Jordan) are presented. The authors emphasise the challenge involved in making OERs or Open Education Practices (OEPs) contextual yet relevant to international users. In Chapter 12, Hayman, et al.'s article focuses on open learning and open communities for pre-K12 practitioners. Considering that most of the

literature on OER focuses on higher education, the article helps to understand pre-K12 practitioners' perspectives on OERs. In Chapter 13, Torre, et al. present a case study of an open learning programme, Collaboratoire, which was carefully designed to enable meaningful collaboration and multi-disciplinary learning among participants. The evaluation of the programme by the participants showed that it fostered three interrelated but distinct dimensions of openness namely multi-perspective openness, inter-perspective openness, and trans-perspective openness.

In Chapter 14, Havemann poses the question: what is open about open education? And argues that one can draw on the concept of OEP to respond to this. He cites the step-up programme at Birkbeck, University of London, to illustrate how the programme, though limiting to a small number of students facilitates openness by encouraging interactions and academic support for students. Focusing on 'fostering openness in higher education institutions, Childs, et al.'s article, in Chapter 15, examines the factors involved in fostering an open culture in institutions, associated challenges and how these can be addressed. In the final chapter, Elias, et al. focus on the importance of principles and values. The book closes with an epilogue from the editors which emphasises the mixed success of open, openness opening, opened education in doing what it aims to do and drawing upon Foucault and Goulay to describe it as a multifaced place, characterised by a bundle of relationships (2020: 395).

Overall, this book makes an excellent contribution to the movement and literature on open education. The articles, while presenting progress made in opening up education at different levels, show that that a lot needs to be done to make open education accessible to all regardless of location, language, ability or disability, gender etc. It is a great resource that I will recommend for students, academics, and educators interested in understanding, theorising, and applying openness in several ways. The chapters leave researchers and educators with areas of exploration that could be taken up in further studies.

Reviewed by

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