Open Education Handbook/What is open education?

Precisely what 'open' means in open education has been the subject of some debate. Contemporary education as a whole may be broadly understood as incorporating a wide range of pedagogical and scholarly activities which can take
place inside or outside formal institutions. Very broadly, these can include:

- **learning**, whether through instruction, guided activity or self-directed learning;
- **teaching** which can include mentoring and all non-instructivist activities around the deliberate nurturing of knowledge;
- **assessment** which may be any combination of summative, formative and/or diagnostic;
- **accreditation** which can include recognising learner or educator accomplishment;
• **policymaking** at any level of education or governance where this influences curriculum, funding and procedures in education; and

• **administration**, dealing with recruitment, admissions, retention, progression, graduation, timetabling, reporting, and management.

In a traditional learning environment (such as a school or university) these aspects of practice tend to relate to each other in familiar ways. When we talk about open education we're really interested in the ways in which our practices can change as a result of adopting open practices, but
also in education outside of formal institutions.

Open Education is a collective term used to refer to many practices and activities that have both openness and education at their core. First and foremost, open education is about removing barriers to education. This may be through removing entry requirements, as The Open University (UK) has done, or by making content and data freely and legally available for reuse. However it also reflects other cultural changes, such as the move to open up learning methods and practices, which sees the blurring or removal of traditional
roles such as teacher and student, moving towards roles such as mentor and learner.

The priorities and practices of Open Education are continually changing. Many aspects of open education engender debate (such as content licensing, definitions of open, incentives for participation, etc.) while other aspects that are less contentious, such as the need for technology to support learning, data use to support education initiatives in the developing world, etc. Overall, there is increasing recognition that education is being transformed and that open
education can play a significant role in this transformation.

Some people tend to think about open education in terms of the content and resources used in education. Seen this way, a piece of data or content is open when it meets the Open Definition, "if anyone is free to use, reuse, and redistribute it — subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and/or share-alike." This means that, with the right 'open' license, resources like textbooks, websites, videos, curricula, lesson plans, audio and image files can be free to share and adapt according to pedagogical needs.
Open licensing typically results in resources being made available more cheaply (or for free). Some commentators have suggested that the distinction between 'open' and 'free' that is derived from the *open source* movement. While free software focuses on the freedom of agents within the software world (e.g., users and developers) 'open source' software focuses on the advantages to the software development process of transparency and sharing.

In open education, for a resource to be open, it must be both *gratis* and *free/open*. That is, one must be able to
access the educational resource at no cost and have the legal rights to reuse, revise, remix and redistribute the resource and/or adaptations of the resource.

In the context of open education the focus until recently has tended toward open access to resources, but there are other ways of being open, reflected in the language of 'open educational practices' (OEP). These are innovations in educational practice that are made possible by open licensing of resources.

It is worth remembering that the open in 'open education' does not apply just to
content, data or resources. Openness is part of wider change and movement towards equality and collaboration.

Further resources

- An excellent introduction to open education is provided by the Open University's Open Learn Open Education MOOC.

- Winning entries of the Why Open Education Matters video competition

- The Capetown Open Education Declaration

- The Hewlett Foundation's white paper on Open Educational Resources
• UNESCO's portal to Open Educational Resources

• The benefits of open - position paper by CETIS/Open Scotland

• The Battle for Open - a perspective by Martin Weller


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