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### Citation

Koseoglu, Suzan; Bozkurt, Aras and Havemann, Leo (2020). Critical Questions for Open Educational Practices. *Distance Education*, 41(2) pp. 153–155.

### URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/70893/>

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## Critical Questions for Open Educational Practices

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A phrase attributed to the Turkish poet and Sufi mystic Yunus Emre (1238–1320) says, “paylaştığın senindir, biriktirdiğin değil” (Aydemir et al., 2016, p. 58), which can be translated as “what you share is yours, not what you gather.” What would sharing mean at the time Yunus Emre lived? Perhaps the sharing of tools, art and crafts, experiences, and knowledge within and among communities. The sharing of history, tradition, and culture from one generation to another through ballads, stories, tales, poems, narratives, performances. Can such practices not be considered both educational and *open*? The answer to this question depends on one’s perspective on what constitutes both educational practices, and openness.

Openness has lately been closely associated with permissive licensing of digital intellectual property, in order to support the creation and reuse of open educational resources (OER). But openness should perhaps be understood as a particular means, rather than an end, of a range of practices often grouped together under the banner of open education. After all, this journal has played a pivotal role in examining the intertwined histories of open and distance learning, within which context the use of open has usually indicated lower barriers to entry and flexible access to teachers and learning resources. And so, we suggest, if means of opening are many, we should consider that ends can also be. However, we consider that a core driver of a wide range of such open(ing) practices has been to improve access, equity, and inclusion, both in and through education.

Consequently, we wish to advance two interwoven propositions on the theme of open educational practices (OEP). First of all, such practices have historicity. They are situated within socio-economic, -cultural, -political, and -technological contexts, and shaped by worldviews, participants, and available resources (human and non-human). Thus, while the term OEP is frequently used to refer to the practices (creation, use, and modification) involved with OER, it should be better understood as a multidimensional and interdisciplinary construct that encompasses a diverse range of open(ing) practices—including increasing access to educational opportunities and materials, open approaches to learning, teaching, pedagogy and scholarship, and the educational use of open data and software (see Cronin & MacLaren, 2018; Havemann, 2016; Koseoglu & Bozkurt, 2018; Naidu, 2016).

However, the usefulness of the concept is not simply that it describes a varied collection of practices, which brings us to our second proposition. Although open practices have a long history in education, the emergence of OEP as a distinct research theme is relatively new (Weller et al., 2018) and appears likely to continue to grow in the near future (Bozkurt et al., 2019). In our view, this recent research interest in OEP has emerged in conjunction with a search for new and critical angles of approach to the discussion of education in a context of digitalization and openness. In the conceptual frame of OEP, it is practices (rather than,

say, resources or courses) which are described as open. Yet, what exactly makes a practice open or closed remains an open question; its answers multiple and provisional. The emphasis on the openness of practices enables the use of OEP as a critical lens through which to examine what exactly, in a given instance, is opened; to what end; and to whose benefit (Havemann, 2020). Such critical angles are much needed to advance scholarly debate, and most vitally, practices themselves. Critical research on OEP increasingly focuses on the challenges of the contexts in which practices take place, taking in issues of culture, pedagogy, technology, law, finance (Hodgkinson-Williams, 2014), and labor (Koseoglu & Bozkurt, 2018). Central to this line of enquiry are the overlapping issues of empowerment, inclusion, and social justice (see, e.g., Czerniewicz, 2018; Hodgkinson-Williams & Arinto, 2017; Stachowiak, 2018).

This special issue of *Distance Education* on OEP is significant, as contributors critically explore some of the emerging and underexplored aspects of OEP. Fundamental to this collection of articles is a recognition that taking a critical approach to OEP does not simply indicate adoption of a research orientation, but rather the embedding of criticality into practices. Studies in this issue shed light on inclusive open practice (Croft & Brown), the intersection of social justice, cultural enrichment, and lifelong learning (Mhichíl et al.), lack of epistemic diversity in OEP (Adam), student experiences (Baran & AlZoubi), lessons learned from open textbook use (Pitt et al.), OEP in K-12 education (Maina et al.), the meaning and form of collaboration in open practice (Kalir), and capacity building in and through OEP (Karunanayaka & Naidu). In their analysis of teachers' use of OER, Pulker and Kukulka-Hulme ask a critical question: "Do inclusive, participatory, and diverse educational practices need to be digital to be open?" Also in this issue, Lee asks a seemingly simple, but complex question: "Who opens online distance education, to whom, and for what?" And so, as you dive in to this thought-provoking collection, we invite you to consider such critical questions; more broadly, we hope you find evidence in these contributions that the turn to practices is a valuable and critical shift in the study of open education, which will surely prove to be essential as we orient our trajectories toward inclusion, equity, and social justice.

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