



OPEN: The Philosophy and Practices that are Revolutionizing Education and Science

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Educational inequalities are as much a reality in affluent and industrialized societies as they are in developing economies. In countries as diverse as New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom, the histories of colonization and immigration have been associated with disparities in access to high quality education. Kozol (1992) points to racial segregation as a primary source of what he calls 'savage inequalities.' He traces systematic differences in per pupil expenditure, funding structure, and facilities between affluent and poor minority school districts in the United States.

This trend endures in the United States to the present: high schoolers taking advanced placement or international baccalaureate courses consistently outperform their less advanced counterparts on various measures of academic achievement and poor students are underrepresented among the educational elect.⁵ In just the first decade of this century, 2.4 million American students either did not attend, or could not complete, college because of the cost barrier.⁶

The open education movement offers one possible, partial remedy to educational inequality. The most obvious benefit of open education is in its low cost. The word 'open,' in this sense, means 'allowing access to' although it is also often equated with 'free of cost.'

In fact, most open education resources are freely available and even in cases where they are low cost, they still help to drive the market toward a lower price point. By removing or substantially reducing the expense normally associated with software, textbooks, and course fees, education becomes more accessible to more people.

The open education movement can also help raise the quality of education for all students because instructors are better able to share and build on one another's pedagogical innovations. It is here, in the second sense of 'open,' meaning customizable by and shareable among instructors, that we have the potential to design more engaging, locally relevant, interactive, and effective teaching resources.