

Openness has won – now what?

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Martin Weller declares the openness battle to have been won. However, this means that new and murkier battle-lines are being drawn. Open vs closed has been replaced with a set of more complex, nuanced debates.



As we start the new year and survey the open education landscape, it's hard not to conclude that openness has prevailed. The victory may not be absolute, but the trend is all one way now – we'll never go back to closed systems in academia anymore than we will return to the Encyclopedia Britannica. Whether it's open access publishing, open data, [Massive Open Online Courses](#) (MOOCs), Open Education Resources, open source or open scholarship – the openness battle has largely been won.

Time to rejoice! But, of course, it's never that simple. When it was simply open vs closed it was a clear distinction. Openness was good, closed was bad. As the victory bells sound though it doesn't take much examination to reveal that it has become a more complex picture now. This is completely natural (it's not a failing). I always used to wonder what happened after the credits rolled in big good vs evil films (where good had been triumphant naturally). In Star Wars, the Empire is destroyed, the Rebels have won! Now what? Well, my guess is you'd go back ten years later and find bickering amongst former allies, that trade wars had arisen, political struggles for power were in place and differences which had been set aside during the great struggle were now coming to the fore. The same with Lord of the Rings. You think the elves, dwarves, hobbits and humans were all still chums 20 years after Sauron had been defeated? Oh no.

In both cases things were better than the dark days, but they wouldn't be simple sweetness either. People (and aliens, and dwarves, and elves) have a tendency to find forms of conflict and disagreement. I apologise slightly for the military language in this post (war, battle, peace, etc), but in many ways that is my point – in the good old days of openness, it felt very much like a conflict – for example between open access publishing and commercial publishers. But that type of language no longer suits the world we are in.

So it is with openness. And that's okay, I know Gardner Campbell (Director of Professional Development and Innovative Initiatives at Virginia Tech University and keynote speaker at the Open Education Conference in October 2012) bemoaned "[that's not what I meant at all](#)", but we shouldn't view this as either an opportunity missed (we could have had the openness camelot!) or romanticise some brief period when it was all okay. The general direction is positive, but it just doesn't seem as noble or simple as it once did.

We replace open vs closed with a set of more complex, nuanced debates, which are, to be honest, a bit boring for many. For example:

- xMOOCs vs cMOOCs [where xMOOC refers to the Massive Open Online Courses rolled out through providers such as coursera, udacity and edX, which largely replicate the instructor-guided lecture format through the use of targeted video content. cMOOC refers to a more connectivist pedagogical approach where participants are more involved with setting the learning goals and creating knowledge and meaning through the web-based connections. For more on the xMOOC model, see [udacity](#), [coursera](#) and [edX](#) websites. For more on the cMOOC model, see this [youtube video](#) produced by education researcher, Dave Cormier and a helpful [list of cMOOCs](#) here]
- [CC-By](#) vs [CC-NC](#)
- [Gold vs Green Open Access Policy](#)
- Self-hosted vs Third party services

But that's the nature of these things – after the grand struggle comes the hard work of the peace. This isn't sexy work, it's about drafting policies, agreements, processes. All of which consolidate the peace and move things forward. It's interesting that history teaches us that often the people who were the leaders and pioneers in the war, aren't the same people you need for the peace. I wonder if the same is true in ed tech?

Note: This article gives the views of the author(s), and not the position of the Impact of Social Sciences blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

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