

Handbook of Open Universities around the World

Edited by Sanjaya Mishra and Santosh Panda

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Fighting for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education

Comments by Sir John Daniel

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It is a pleasure to take part in this session. Greetings to all those tuning in from around the world.

I start by congratulating Sanjaya Mishra and Santosh Panda on the magnificent achievement of putting this book together, and by commending Routledge for publishing it in such an attractive way. I know how difficult it is to get open universities together around a project, because I tried to do it in 2017 for the ICDE World Conference on Online Learning in Toronto. I mostly failed, whereas Sanjaya and Santosh have inspired more than a hundred scholars to contribute to over 50 excellent chapters on the current state of open universities around the world.

It is a telling commentary on our dividing world that this session is taking place just three days after the US Department of Justice declared that: *diversity, equity and inclusion practices are unlawful and “discriminatory.”* Juxtapose that with the aims of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which are to: *ensure inclusive, equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

We cannot have it both ways.

We are at the end of a long period when most countries usually aligned to the ideological and political positions taken by the US government whether they liked them or not. That period is clearly over. Open universities are just one example of an example of a global network of institutions that have embedded the ideals of diversity, equity and inclusion so deeply into their work that there is no going back. These ideals are deeply entwined with the concept of *openness*, which will be the subject of my short remarks, which I have titled '*Fighting for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education*'.

Let's go back to the beginning. Why are they called *open universities*? In the opening chapter of the book, I trace the origins of the name and what the pioneers meant by it when they conceived the UK Open University back in the 1960s.

In its pre-project phase, the UKOU was first called the University of the Air, because its political founder, prime minister Harold Wilson, wanted to use radio and TV broadcasting to expand the limited reach of higher education to a much wider audience. A planning committee was formed to put flesh on the bones of the concept. An early decision was to change the name to The Open University. The new institution would be named for its purpose - to open higher education - not for the airwaves that it would use as one medium for its teaching.

The first chancellor of the UKOU, Lord Crowther, then editor of The Economist newspaper, unpacked the meanings of openness in a brilliant short address at the inaugural ceremony, held in 1969 in the week that humans first landed on the moon. It was a time for new thinking.

Crowther's speech still moves me. He gave the UKOU its slogan, what we later called, somewhat in Chinese style, 'the four opens'. He said:

We will be open to people: 'no formal academic qualifications will be required for registration as a student'.

We will be open to places: 'the University has no cloisters - a word meaning closed... it will be disembodied and air-borne'.

We will be open to methods: 'Every new form of human communication will be examined to see how it can be used to raise and broaden the level of human understanding'.

We will be open to ideas: 'The limits, not only of explorable space, but of human understanding, are infinitely wider than we have believed... There are two aspects of education, both necessary. One regards the individual human mind as a vessel, into which is to be poured as much as it will hold of the knowledge and experience by which human society lives and moves. This is the Martha of education – and we shall have plenty of these tasks to perform. But the Mary regards the human mind rather as a fire that must be set alight and blown with the divine efflatus.'

Since that speech there have been other attempts to capture the elements of openness.

Som Naidu lists open access, open learning, open scholarship. This reminds us that the desire for openness in education has also led to the development of open educational resources (OER), open software, and open access to scholarship and research. More recently Sanjaya Mishra has pulled this all together in a list of what he calls the ten affordances of openness, which are:

Entry requirements

Study location

Time of learning

Curricular flexibility

Pedagogical approach

Technology use

Learning resources

Assessment approach

Recognition of credentials

Cost of education

If each of these features is rated on a nine-point scale between closed and open, institutions can assess themselves on their overall openness.

The key point, made throughout the book, is that open universities should be open to being open in ways that meet the needs of their jurisdiction. An open university attempting to be open on all these dimensions would be too complex to be viable. Choices must be made.

My final point is that although open universities must make good choices of teaching technologies and implement them effectively, they should not vest too much hope in artificial intelligence. It will eventually play a role in their work, but it will not replace the creativity of dedicated teachers.

Crowther hit the nail on the head. The human mind is both a vessel for knowledge and a fire to be set alight. Over my 11 years as vice-chancellor of the UKOU I conversed with some 50,000 graduating students at well over 100 convocation ceremonies. Many told me of courses that had changed their lives by creating new perspectives and opportunities. Open universities must retain the imagination to show that courses created by human intelligences can light fires in the mind as bright as those issuing from artificial intelligence.