

## OER: about nuthatches and pragmatists

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Over the past few days, I have attended the annual Open Education Conference in Vancouver. I have been visiting that congress since 2007 and have seen it change in terms of content and structure. Initially it was a meeting where experiences were exchanged on OER projects (which were often in the start-up phase) and also presentations on cautious attempts to introduce educational innovations with OER. The conference participants knew each other well.

This year I noticed that many newcomers had decided to start with OER and hoped to learn how to do so at the conference. Naturally, MOOCs were also discussed in presentations (I also gave a presentation on them, together with Fred Mulder). What struck me was how disparagingly, even occasionally patronizing, this development was discussed in presentations. Yes, it is true: certainly the MOOCs that are now in the spotlight (from the Ivy League universities, via the Coursera, Udacity or EdX platforms) are based on a traditional educational model and are therefore not innovative from a didactical point of view (although I find it an achievement to reach tens of thousands of learners who are doing an online course in a limited time), the content itself is not open in the sense of "open to adaptation and reuse". But the MOOCs have created a great deal of awareness in large circles, including outside education, about the possibilities that the Internet can offer here. This is also a form of innovation that does not deserve such a condescending attitude.

Hester Jelgerhuis of SURF, also present at the congress, talked to a representative of the University of Texas, new to this world and hoping to get answers to very practical questions such as "we want something with OER. How do I deal with this? Where should I start? What should I pay attention to?" He was disappointed with what he heard in the presentations. No answers to his questions, but views on what can and cannot be called open. He made a striking comparison with developments in the field of sustainability. Sustainability, just like OER, is also a subject on which every sensible person will find: you cannot be opposed to it. Two types can be distinguished in this world. One type adheres strictly to the doctrine. They take action to raise awareness of this subject and from time to time they go a step further and chain themselves to trees that are in danger of being cut down or lie in front of trains that transport nuclear waste. These are the "**nuthatches**". The other type looks for practical solutions in order to make its own contribution. They install solar panels, choose more environmentally friendly forms of transport (but also fly to the other side of the world if necessary) and do their shopping more consciously. Those are the **pragmatists**.

Both types are necessary to advance a movement. But does the world of OER currently need the pragmatic types? And, in order to ultimately achieve an ideal open world (whatever that may be), is it not necessary to be a little less strict in our doctrine when it comes to offering OER? The task of the open world is to develop these pragmatic approaches and to be a little less strict. Western Governor University's Tom Caswell formulated this as '**we should be more open about open**'. In my opinion, real progress will then be made towards achieving a world in which openness of education will become a default.

In this development, we can perhaps learn from the sustainability movement. Look back thirty years and consider what developments have taken place in that area since then. One lesson has quickly been learnt: these developments need that time.

Nuthatches or pragmatists: it's your choice!