Bonk, Curtis J. (2009). *The world is open: How web technology is revolutionizing education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. US$29.95. ISBN#9780470461303.

Abstract

This book review of The *World is Open: How Web Technology is Revolutionizing Education* by Curtis J. Bonk (2009) includes a brief overview of the book, along with a discussion of prevalent themes in the book. In addition to the stated theme of online learning, many of Bonk's examples and analyses focus on empowerment of the learner as a core concept in education of the future.

Keywords: learner empowerment, elearning, education

1. Introduction

The *World is Open: How Web Technology is Revolutionizing Education* by Curtis J. Bonk (2009) is about possibility. It is about a change in outlook, a change in ability, a change in culture made possible by emergent technology. Above all, *The World is Open* is about learning.

Bonk claims that this book intends to provide a "personal pilgrimage into what one can do online in the Web of Learning." The format of the book is that of a survey of a variety of technologies, software tools, and ideas that support learning

either directly or indirectly. While there is some reference to research supporting their use, the primary goal of the book is to deliver a framework for the discussion of learning technologies, supported by examples of the technologies in use. The book is a guide to emerging perspectives on learning in the digital age.

Internet and mobile technologies have emerged which enable learning in ways that were not possible twenty, ten, or even five years ago. Some people are familiar with the world of blogs, forums, wikis, eBooks, open courseware, and social networking, others may know of them but may feel intimidated by the idea of entering that world. Some people have no knowledge of these technologies at all. Most people know a little about a few of the technologies but are unsure how to put them to use. Regardless of the experience level, this book reaches a wide audience. The book is for the educator looking to improve practice, for parents who want to understand what the online world can offer their child, for the lifelong learner looking to expand their knowledge, and for anyone who has an interest in learning.

The book opens with a chapter that gives illustrative examples of how people are learning using online and other digital resources, and introduces the WE-ALL-LEARN framework for discussion of learning technologies. WE-ALL-LEARN is an acronym

for ten educational 'Openers' that Bonk feels are having a great impact on the future of learning. The ten chapters that follow, each dedicated to one of the Openers, demonstrate the value of the framework. While one may argue the correct placement of individual technologies within the framework, each chapter unfolds a different viewpoint of learning based on the technologies discussed.

An important theme throughout the book is empowerment of the learner. While frequently dealing with topics related to use of educational technology in formal settings in the discourse, the examples are most often of learners who are using the technologies to enhance their learning in informal situations. For example, a discussion of open courseware projects cannot take place without mentioning that far more people are accessing them for informal learning than for formal learning.

Another example of this theme is in the realm of learner-produced content on the web such as blogs and wikis. These technologies give learners the opportunity to reproduce the knowledge that they are acquiring. This leads to the observation that "students are taking on the roles of teachers, and those formerly known as teachers are better positioned as guides, tutors, and mentors in their learning quests."

The book closes with a set of predictions and a set of warnings. The predictions are not meant to predict the

trajectory of any one technology, but to focus "on what the convergence of many learning technologies are giving rise to." The warnings are issues that may significantly blunt the impact of the educational 'openers'. Some of these issues, like quality control of open resources, the digital divide, and cheating on assessments will be familiar to most readers and are mentioned several times throughout the book. Others, such as language dominance, are not as well-discussed and may be less familiar to readers. Perhaps a short-coming of the books is that Bonk does not attempt any deep discussion of them or put forth any solutions.

Despite the warnings he gives, Bonk takes a very positive viewpoint on the direction that learning has taken over the last few years and will take in the future. The emphasis of the book is on potential and it does not overstep its bounds by making overly-extravagant claims, nor does Bonk let any negative viewpoint intrude for long. Bonk is clearly a champion of learning technology and does not pretend otherwise. The important thing is that he also comes across as a champion of learning, and therefore his vision of a radically different version of education in the future is a believable one.

3. Conclusions

At the close of the book, Bonk lists more than a dozen different audiences for *The World is Open*. However, there are

four audiences that probably will feel the most impact. First, it is useful for the lifelong learner, who can use *The World is Open* as a sourcebook for exploring new and inspiring learning opportunities. Second, it is useful for the progressive educator, who can take from the book a wealth of ideas about new teaching methods supported by the examples Bonk provides. Third, the parents of digital children will find this useful, who can gain an understanding of where learning is evolving and more fully develop their own ideas about how their children should be educated. And finally, the educator of the future will find this book useful, who may not yet know their calling but whose feet are guided by this book on the first step of their journey to self-discovery.

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