

# The World is Open

---

Curtis J. Bonk, *The World is Open: How Web Technology is Revolutionizing Education*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2009, 400 pp., US\$29.95

Robert R. Wadholm

Previously published in 2009 as a book review in *Educational Technology Research and Development* Association for Educational Communications and Technology 2009

**T***he world is open: How web technology is revolutionizing education* (2009), by Curtis J. Bonk, is an enlightening journey into the world of Web 2.0 resources and the future (and present) of global educational opportunities. The book follows in the footsteps of Thomas L. Friedman's *The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century* (2005). Bonk carries Friedman's thought into the realm of education, with the idea of an open world arising from the widespread and uninhibited accessibility of educational opportunities and resources. For Bonk, the world's openness means "anyone can now learn anything from anyone at anytime" (p. 13). The journey begins with e-books and ends with networks of personalized learning. The reader is treated to an amazing variety of openers that have helped to make the world of today a different educational environment than it was even 10 or 20 years ago. These openers are tools, resources, conceptual frameworks, and environments that conjoin to create a more open world. Bonk's 10 major openers include e-learning and blended learning, open source and free software, leveraged resources and open courseware, learning object repositories and portals, open information communities, electronic collaboration, alternate reality, and real-time mobility and portability. Bonk uses anecdotal stories to convince the reader of the power of the 10 openers. This reader needed no convincing.

Bonk's optimistic tone and sure grasp of the myriad of tools and resources available in the world of e-learning today were too far compelling to resist. On one hand, this book was difficult to read. Pages were so full of resources, I could not help but look up and explore each resource mentioned. The spirit of discovery in the book slowed my progress. On the other hand, the book was an easy read. Every few pages, Bonk described a new resource with the potential to change the educational landscape of tomorrow. This book is full of the excitement that

surrounds Web 2.0 and new media technologies. Bonk is careful to avoid being bogged down in the details of each technology, and leaves it in the reader's hands to experiment with each tool and resource. He only includes scholarly material when necessary to drive home a point, making *The world is open* a popular and vividly enchanting account of what otherwise might be portrayed as an overly complex and confusing new world.

The many vignettes of e-learning possibilities shared in the book were also invaluable. The reader is treated to several dozen stories about individuals who are creating and using new tools to open our world. Many of these vignettes center on the author, and find Bonk in a quickly evolving world of opportunities. The reader is caught up in the excitement as story after story highlights the power of these new trends. These stories bring to my mind the many personal events in my own life that helped to change the way I thought about and interacted with my world. Tools like blogging, podcasting, and twittering have become something ingrained into my life, but I still remember first encountering the tools and realizing their power to change the world. Some of these moments came while reading this book and trying out the new tools introduced (for instance, after signing up for Livemocha, a social network for language learners, I was personally chatting with a person in Brazilian Portuguese within 5 min). The power of these narratives lies in their personal touch, in their call to personal responsibility for learning and for world changing, and in their commentary on the world of individuals touching and changing their environments for the better.

Bonk's identification and classification of various tools and resources were often up-to-the-minute (sometimes literally, as when Bonk tells of emails he received while writing parts of the book). These snapshots of history in the making create a compelling narrative that is a cutting-edge exposition of our changing world. It is a situated map of the educational landscape. However, this may be the book's fatal flaw. What good will it be after 2 years, after 10 years or even after a century? Will the book still be useful to future readers? I think the answer is yes, but perhaps for different reasons. The framework behind the ten openers has at its center an overall approach to teaching and learning that is valuable both now and in the future. While understandings, tools, and resources will change and evolve, there remains the call to open the world to learning, to create a better society through education, and to continue the drive toward universal collaboration and intellectual growth. Will a book

on Web 3.0 technologies and participatory e-learning be vastly different than the present book? Perhaps. But perhaps it will contain many of the same themes of openness, usability, accessibility, mobility, and portability. And perhaps the general thrust of the present book will inform the future of education to a point where people will look back to it with the thought: “Of course. Didn’t people know these things before this book was written?” Regardless of how this book is received in the market or in the wider educational setting, the message surely cannot go without being heard. It is, after all, a call to action.

This action is often at the center of the exposition. Bonk helps the reader to get the most from their reading by highlighting the meaningfulness of the content for various types of readers. Bonk is careful to hone in on the needs of different groups of readers and pays careful attention to relevance of content and practicality of application. A spirit of adventure and personal participation gives the book a tone that helps the reader appreciate the concreteness of the propositions. Educators, students, life-long learners, interested young people, and young-at-heart adults may all find something in this book that pertains directly to their life and that will enhance their learning and/or teaching.

Bonk’s grasp and elucidation of the key point—the world is open—is effectively contagious and overwhelming in its motivation to continue these global educational trends. Though it is a simple idea, within the framework of Web 2.0 and participatory e-learning this concept is difficult to fully grasp. What does it mean for the world to be open? It means we all learn, anytime, anywhere, and from anyone. As we connect we learn. To learn is to become open, and to open a world of opportunities that would not have otherwise been possible. To open the world means to eliminate boundaries to learning and becoming. Lifelong learning can be fostered by freeing up learning to mobile environments, by creating free and open learning resources, by creating collaborative environments that mesh well with a constructivist pedagogy, and by bringing learners closer to their learning across time, geography, and ethnicity. It is learning without borders. Beyond the classroom. Sometimes in the world of the web, sometimes in the world of the personal media player, sometimes in the virtual self-created world of serious gaming, and sometimes at home at the computer. The world has become a more open educational environment, and thus has provided more learning opportunities for its inhabitants. There need be no famine of learning in our world today. The buffet lines are open, and Bonk has given us a menu! *Bon appetit.*

## References

---

Bonk, C. J. (2009). *The world is open: How web technology is revolutionizing education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Friedman, T. L. (2005). *The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux.

Find the online version of this ETR&D article here:  
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/774218251834325/>