

BOOKTRIB

THE LIFESTYLE DESTINATION FOR BOOK LOVERS

Just Who is the World Open For and When? by Curt Bonk

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Books in the field of education are somewhat different than those in business, healthcare, or politics. The reason I say this is that every person reading or reviewing an education book was a learner at some point in his or her life. They may not have been a businessperson, a politician, or a nurse or a doctor, but they will have been a student in someone's classroom or learning environment. And that sense of being a learner extends from well before birth to the day of final departure. We learn at all moments of the day, all seasons of the year, and in all types of rooms as well as at all sorts of events. Face it, as members of the species known as humans, we learn. Farmers, rappers, fashion designers, and baseball players, learn. So do accountants, park rangers, artists, custodians, airplane pilots, and hotel and restaurant managers.

Remember Chesley Sullenberger (Sully) who helped land a badly damaged US Airways Flight 1549 in the Hudson River without any major injuries? He was a hero. But his heroic actions were only possible since he continued to learn throughout his life. He fully admits that he was always learning new things about flight from his training episodes. As with Sully, learning for each of us is one of the few constants we encounter in life. When we learn, it almost provides that sense of comfort that we know we are indeed human and always capability of so much more.

What is important to realize is that today that learning takes place with not just people down the street or in your community or work setting, but with your social network or collaborative work group that wraps in multiple intersecting layers around the world. You are not simply a learner in a public library hoping that the card catalog leads you to a book that is currently in stock. That was yesterday's learning approach. Today, you are part of a global community of learners. And this community can share books, comment on them, rate them, and form groups around them.

It is truly the day of free and open education. And this day reaches each of you in personally unique ways. Education permeates everything we do every single day including quiet mornings sipping tea and reading the newspaper, participating in wonderful social gatherings, checking out apartments to rent online, or running down your favorite jogging trail with an iPod. Of course, we learn in each of those times and settings.

What is becoming increasingly clear is that human learning is no longer confined to a four-walled classroom. With the emergence of the Web, it has swiftly expanded well beyond the province of a school or a library. And it is much more informal and spontaneous than the conventional school structures of the past. Each youngster; each student enrolled in high school or higher education; each corporate employee or trainer; each government or military worker; and each of the 6.7 billion people on this planet for that matter, has a stake in this idea of pervasive and openly accessible education. It does not matter what sector of the economy in which you are gainfully employed or hoping to someday find a job; learning is the key cog in the wheel of our economic engine.

For a writer of an education book who was initially trained in the business world, this is simultaneously a wonderful and yet highly tension-filled event. The giddy part comes from the assortment of people I get to meet when writing or revising each section of this book. The tension is derived from knowing that everyone who reads this book, or potentially might read it, has extensive educational experiences and, hence, has an opinion about how they or their children should be educated. That also means that a book like “The World Is Open: How Web Technology Is Revolutionizing Education” needs to touch on all sectors of education from K-12 to higher education to corporate to military to government and to informal learning. Add to that the fact that this book attempts to point to how the Web is revolutionizing education and the stress mounts higher and higher. Few people, if any, truly have a grasp on all the technological possibilities that can better educate the people of this planet. And if you attempt to do so, you will quickly be overwhelmed and perhaps frustrated.

To help us all avoid going totally bonkers (pun intended), I have attempted to make sense of the key learning technology trends or “openers” that are impacting all of us each day. When the first letters of each of these ten openers is strung together, they spell “WE-ALL-LEARN.” I do not have space here to detail each one of these openers. See my prior blog post for explanations of a few of the ten technology trends that are making the educational world more open for each of us.

In addition to the WE-ALL-LEARN model, another means I found to address all the possible audiences of this book was not to be content with just one book. So, near the end of this process, I decided to write a second book (though I had over 100,000 words of starter text to work from). This additional one is nearly done. And in accordance with the theme I am trying to convey, I am making it a free and open access book. I will post it to the WorldisOpen.com website as well as to other book sharing sites such as Scribd.com. When looking at the two books in a combined fashion, there is coverage across nearly all types of learners and learning styles, educational sectors, age groups, and geographic regions of the world. No one book can address all learners and no one model can incorporate all the learning technologies available today. But one that suggests a revolution that has been created by a freer and more open educational system must at least attempt to show every learner on the planet how this is possible.

Ten Openers: (WE-ALL-LEARN)

1. Web Searching in the World of e-Books
2. E-Learning and Blended Learning
3. Availability of Open Source and Free Software
4. Leveraged Resources and OpenCourseWare
5. Learning Object Repositories and Portals
6. Learner Participation in Open Information Communities
7. Electronic Collaboration

8. Alternate Reality Learning
9. Real-Time Mobility and Portability
10. Networks of Personalized Learning

The website for “The World Is Open” book (see <http://worldisopen.com/>) is filled with references and Web resources for each of the ten openers (see <http://worldisopen.com/resources.php>). You can browse these at any moment of the day, week, or month. Such is the open world. Explore what interests you and share the eye-popping ones with your friends and colleagues; they are learners too. You can also ignore that which is not relevant. You choose. It is your free and open learning world. Enjoy it! It is often free, you know...

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