



The Unfolding of an Open Book by Curt Bonk

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It was October 2005 when I first spoke on the topic of this book—open education—while doing a keynote speech titled “Oops, Did I Mean to Share that?,” at the E-Learn Conference in Vancouver. Two weeks later I was invited by someone who was in the audience to fly back out to the west coast. He wanted me to speak about this more free and open learning world to Microsoft executives who were flying in to Redmond, Washington from around the world. So I did. Their cool demeanors did not provide any clues about how they felt about the more open world. But my son, Alex, who joined me in the trip, thought it went extremely well. So perhaps it did. Months later, I told him that Microsoft officials must have thought I really meant it when I said that education should be free as it took more than 9 months to get paid for my talk. Such a delay happened to me a few years earlier when an accounting clerk died and my check sat on her desk for a number of months.

Ok, back to the story about the book. Dozens of talks about this topic would occur during the rest of 2005 and into 2006. Soon it was February 2007. My colleague and former student, Dr. Charles Graham from BYU and I drafted a proposal for this book, *The World Is Open: How Web Technology Is Revolutionizing Education* (see <http://worldisopen.com/>). That was not the original title; instead, that title would evolve over the next 20 months. Many friends would help in the naming process. In a nutshell, Charles and I were planning to do an edited book with contributors being people who had changed the world of education with technology. As we had done with a previous book, “*The Handbook of Blended Learning*” published in 2006, we compiled a huge and continually growing list of people to write chapters. Positive feedback on our proposals was coming in from many sources—friends, colleagues, publishers, friends of publishers, etc. Some were calling it an educational extension of the popular book, “*The World is Flat*” by Thomas Friedman. So were we.

One person I wrote to at the time was Peter Fingar from Meghan-Kiffer Publishing. Peter had recently published a book “*The World is Flat? A Critical Analysis of the New York Times Bestseller by Thomas Friedman.*” He was keenly interested in our project. However, he advised me to write the book myself and publish it with him or perhaps think about self-publishing it and he would help. March 2007 came. I met Peter in the Tampa-St. Pete Airport. He bought my family lunch and tried desperately to convince me to take these steps.

I had a difficult decision to make. It became more difficult as books from Meghan-Kiffer arrived in the mail. And more books. Still more books. Some real good ones! Peter was great. I really liked him. So, I was leaning to working with Meghan-Kiffer. But after much agony, I took a risk and wrote the book without an agent or a publisher. As a side note, this was not complete folly; I had briefly chatted with Thomas Friedman via email about my project as well as his publisher. I was hoping that they would pick it up. If not, I had connections at several highly respected publishing companies. On top of that, when done I hired an attorney who specialized in the media and entertainment industries (and were also agents for writers). His role was to help in negotiations with publishers. That was crucial! But I did not get him until late in the process.

So in late June 2007, I started writing. And writing and writing and writing. There were multiple stacks of papers two feet high to wade through. New articles also arrived each day as did announcements about the latest and greatest technology tool or gadget. Just looking at my office would quickly stress anyone out. Sheer chaos! But, with my accounting skills always at the ready, it was organized chaos. To reduce my stress level, I ran every morning for roughly 14 months. Yes, every single, stupid day. And I got stupider and stupider. I ran so much that I nearly blew out my feet. Planter fasciitis was killing both of them. I could barely walk. A boot came to sleep in at night to stabilize the foot. But like Forest Gump, I ran and I ran and I ran. What an idiot I was! While I increased my running, I decreased other things. For instance, no television, no family, no international travel (previously, I was doing 100+ talks per year), and no beer or other forms of alcohol. Having grown up in Milwaukee—the land of beer—the last one hurt worse than the planter fasciitis. Smile.

As I got close to finishing a draft of the book, I hired a couple of editors and reviewers to help me fine tune it. They suffered through some pretty bad versions (though my main problem was writing too much). With their help, the manuscript was finished and sent out for review on August 3, 2008. I then drove up to Madison, Wisconsin to keynote the annual Wisconsin Distance Teaching and Learning Conference (by the way, I head to this conference again next week). My keynote topic would revolve the content of this book. Great feedback there! After a year of writing, that was a relief.

I did not realize that I wrote perhaps 2 times as much as anyone could conceivably publish. Fortunately, Jossey-Bass/Wiley worked with me in the past and knew my overwriting tendencies. My wonderful editor at JB/Wiley, Kate Bradford, helped me whittle down this tome. We cut over 130,000 words. Yes, 130,000 words! She told me that it might be a record. Well, the book came out a couple of weeks ago and I am now taking that record-setting cut content and smoothing it out and adding new stories to create a free e-book extension at the WorldisOpen.com website.

So that is what happened to the World is Open book project in a nutshell. There is much more in between that I dare not bring up now. I owe a slew of debts to many people. Hundreds of people are mentioned in dozens of stories in “The World is Open” book. My next blog post will explain how I was able to contact these people as well as how I am still contacting them. Back soon.

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