Q & A with Ed Tech Leaders

Interview with Curt Bonk & Elaine Khoo

Michael F. Shaughnessy
Mark Viner

1. What have you been doing recently, in researching and writing?

Curt: I have a paper in press concerning where my team and I looked at over 300 informal learning Websites for their potential to spark self-directed learning and perhaps even change lives. We categorized these into six domains of learning: online language learning, outdoor and

Curt Bonk is Professor of Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University and President of CourseShare. Drawing on his background as a corporate executive, CPA, educational psychologist, and instructional technologist, he offers unique insights into the intersection of business, education, psychology, and technology. A well-known authority on emerging technologies for learning, he reflects on his speaking experiences around the world in his popular blog, TravelinEdMan. He has authored several widely used technology books, including The World is Open, Empowering Online Learning, and, most recently, with Elaine Khoo, Adding Some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ Activities for Motivating and Retaining Learners Online, which is free as an eBook (http://tec-variety.com/) (e-mail: cjbonk@indiana.edu).

Elaine Khoo is a Research Fellow at the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Education based in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Her research interests include teaching and learning in information and communications technology (ICT), supported learning environments, and e-learning/online learning contexts, with a particular interest in online learning communities, participatory learning cultures, and collaborative research contexts. She has recently completed projects investigating networked science inquiry in secondary classrooms and iPad use among preschoolers (e-mail: ekhoo@waikato.ac.nz).

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The next article in this series, to appear in the November–December issue, will be the magazine’s final report on research journals in the field of educational technology. Then, early in 2016, Dr. Richard E. West, series editor, will wrap up this project with an article on what has been learned about the journals in the field.

Visitors Welcome to Offices

Readers of Educational Technology are always welcome to visit the offices of the magazine in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, overlooking the Hudson River and New York City. Please call or e-mail our offices at any time to arrange for a visitation: 201-871-4007; edtecpubs@aol.com.

Lawrence Lipsitz, the Editor, and staff of the magazine look forward to conversations with our readers about developments within the broad field of educational technology. Throughout our 55 years of service to the ed tech community all over the world, numerous individuals and groups have visited the magazine’s offices. This has included official delegations representing developing countries interested to learn about progress in the field within the United States.

These conversations also assist the editors and staff to keep in touch with what leaders in the field are doing locally, nationally, and internationally. Dialogues often lead to articles and other features in future issues of the publication.


adventure learning, social change and global learning, virtual education, learning portals, and shared online video. The content analysis focused on eight evaluation criteria: content richness, functionality of technology, extent of technology integration, novelty of technology, uniqueness of learning environment/learning, potential for learning, potential for life-changing impact, and scalability of the audience. The six categories or types of informal learning were then compared by applying the eight criteria.

I also have an article prepared wherein my colleagues and I explore the learning preferences, goals and motivations, obstacles and challenges, and achievements of over 1,600 MIT OpenCourseWare (OCW) subscribers. We also look at life changes from the use of open educational resources (OER) and massive open online courses (MOOCs).

Key motivational factors included things like personal curiosity, interest in a topic, and internal need for self-improvement. As might be expected, the key factors leading to success or personal change included freedom to learn, resource abundance, choice, control, and “fun.” Among the chief implications was that learning something new to enhance one’s life or to help others is often more important than course transcript credit or a certificate of completion. People are learning new things all the time; the needed educational resources are all around them. As a result, they no longer are solely focused on a degree when they are learning.

Finally, my colleagues, Mimi Lee from the University of Houston, Tom Reeves from the University of Georgia, and Tom Reynolds from National University, and I have edited a comprehensive book on MOOCs and Open Education Around the World. There is a book homepage which people can explore (see the Table of Contents: http://routledge-ny.com/books/details/9781138807419). The book addresses MOOCs and open education design and assessment issues, the use of MOOCs and open educational resources in the developing world, critical problems and challenges, MOOC alternatives and derivatives, corporate training applications, and myriad opportunities on the horizon.

Elaine: At the moment, my research team and I have been researching the idea of software literacy in two very different disciplines in higher education—Medial Studies and Engineering. Almost all of our daily activities today are embedded in and shaped by our interactions with software at some level. We are trying to understand how university students pick up the basic skills to use software and how they troubleshoot problems faced when using software.

More importantly, we want to know the extent they can critique the specialized software they are using and whether they are aware of how using software can shape how they engage with knowledge within a discipline. It is an exciting study because it challenges our assumptions about digital natives and digital literacy, and brings together ideas from software studies, formal and informal learning, and innovations in university teaching and learning practices.

So far, it is confirming what we know about students tending to resort to informal learning strategies, referring to YouTube and other freely available online tutorials, apart from their course work, to learn more and address a specific software issue. However, developing the ability to critique and having an awareness of how the affordances of software impact the kinds of knowledge that is communicated or presented is still very much a challenge, even for final-year undergrads. There are important implications for educators as a result of our findings to better support student learning in these contexts.

2. What would you say to someone who wanted to have a “traditional” online classroom or environment?

Curt: That is the beauty of online and blended forms of learning. These new delivery mechanisms and educational resources do not mandate a particular learning theory or teaching philosophy. You can lecture online using Adobe Connect or some other synchronous tool and record the event for students who cannot be there. I do this all the time. Look at the explosion of lecture videos and flipping the classroom possibilities with shared online video.

Elaine: It depends on what one is trying to achieve and the person’s willingness to take risk and be courageous in trying out new ideas. I think we all learn from starting out with “shovelware” (literally, transcribing our face-to-face course into the online context), until we discover that there are better and more effective ways. Today, online instructors are spoiled for choice and have access to vast knowledge and resources. My message to someone who wanted to have a “traditional” online classroom would be to question yourself and your practice as to whether this really is the best way forward for your students. Start by taking baby steps, look up resources, and give new online activities a “go” to enhance your practice.

3. What would be the top five things you would want a person to take away related to online learning?

Curt:

1. No one online teaching and learning idea is best. There are thousands of interactive, engaging, creative, and collaborative pedagogical strategies that you can decide to use today.
2. You do not need to try everything. Do perhaps one or two or three strategies from our TEC-VARIETY book each semester.
3. Sharing your ideas is vital.
4. The field continues to evolve.
5. There is much that can be done to lower the resistance and reluctance of instructors, such as
creating communities of practice among those who
discuss their online instructional ideas.

Elaine:
1. Online learning can be scary/hard work/time consum-
ing.
2. Human motivation to learn (or not) cannot be under-
estimated.
3. One needs to know oneself (what one is comfortable
with in his/her teaching practice), who the learners
are, and what technologies one might want to start to
experiment with to encourage students to be more
involved in a subject matter.
4. There are compelling success stories that online
courses can be just as effective as face-to-face
courses.
5. We all learn as a community. Share with us your own
applications, adaptations, and improvements—
we'd love to hear from you.

4. What do you believe are the main themes or critical
aspects for successful online learning?

Curt: There is a need for an openness to new experi-
ences. This openness is vital. There is much that will be
tried online that no one has attempted; some ideas, tasks,
or activities will be new for the instructor as well as stu-
dents. There must be an air of experimentation and risk-
taking. All the people involved must be willing to take risks.
Opening the course with social icebreakers might display
such risk taking. There is a need for advance planning,
structure, and reminders. This is still very much a “brave
new world” out there in the online teaching and learning
arena. As such, learners need some guidance and struc-
ture as to the goals and expectations for the course and for
each week of the course. Weekly reminders can go a long
way toward success. Then, successful online learning
requires examples of tasks and goals. These examples
might be best-practices from the previous semesters of the
course, or they may come from other sources such as
demonstrations or how-to’s in YouTube.

Elaine: From an instructor perspective, getting the
balance of teaching the content, students’ learning, and
technology right. Some of my earlier work was influenced
partly by Koehler and Mishra’s work on technology,
pedagogy, and content knowledge. I still see these ideas
being played out in our work with teachers and students
adopting new tools in their blended or fully online courses,
be it experimenting with wikis, podcasts, digital storytelling,
or considering mobile technologies, etc. In TEC-VARIETY
(http://tec-variety.com/) we have provided activities and
Web resources as a toolkit for instructors to draw from, for
example, on different content areas, risk levels of imple-
mentation, examples of implementation, and technology
tools available, across different educational contexts. In
various chapters, we remind instructors to consider their
content, context, and students, as they know them best.
Start small in making the changes you are comfortable with
and progressively move ahead as you gain the confidence
and willingness to take risk. Work with colleagues and
share your practices and ideas for refinement. Build in
opportunities for your students to give feedback and learn
with/from your students along this journey. We’ve found
this method works best in encouraging more effective and
sustainably successful online pedagogies.

5. Is there an overall learning theory you choose to
drive your online courses?

Curt: I am increasingly eclectic. I consider myself a
learning environment psychologist. So, like Elaine, I take a
sociocultural approach as a given. I want to expose
learners to those in different cultures and backgrounds. I
think that global aspects of education are just now starting
to emerge within online learning environments. Such a
global or multicultural curriculum will have huge payoffs or
benefits for society decades from now. I want my students
to be better able to take the perspectives of others as a
result of taking my classes and engaging in cross-cultural
and cross-institutional activities. I want them to better
understand cultural, social, and educational differences.
With tools like Skype, Google Hangouts, Adobe Connect,
Meeting Words, Pirate Pad, Wikispaces, PBWorks, and so
on, there are many tools available to link learners from the
far reaches of the planet for an interesting and engaging
activity, task, or course event.

While I have been experimenting with global education
activities in higher education settings for a couple of
decades, I have a team investigating global curriculum and
technology integration projects with K–12 classrooms
taking part in TakingITGlobal (TIG), Flat Connections,
Round Square, World Savvy, and other such projects and
initiatives. Such projects can empower youth with emerging
technologies for collaboration and interaction.

Elaine: My own foray into online learning research was
based on sociocultural ideas about people learning through
participating in the cultural activities of a community, the
notion of online learning communities as a way forward to
involve learners in the learning process and journey. I think
every learning theory has its contributions to online learn-
ing pedagogy, depending on what you’re trying to achieve
in your course. From Behaviorism, we have the importance
of setting objectives and giving feedback, for example.
I think it is important that instructors be aware of their
teaching beliefs/philosophy/underpinning theory they
subscribe to so they can base and develop their practice
coherently on these. Also, what sort of risks/how open are
you to push yourself outside your comfort zone in trying out
a new tool in your online course in conjunction with your
beliefs or as an extension of your beliefs?

6. Often we hear about someone who takes a class at
the public library as they do not have Internet access at
home or a laptop. How problematic is this, or should
we be commending their diligence and motivation?

Curt: We should always compliment effort, grit, desire,
passion, and determination. We all have learning histories in
which we have done something that would be considered
unusual today in order to learn something in light of what
exists now in the 21st century. Even today when we have
the Internet at our fingertips, with our mobile phones and
tablet computers, going to the library or café or an open school at night might be what works for many people. I remember spending every night of first grade in the public library on the way home from Irving Elementary School. We did not have a computer at home. No one did. My mother did not text or call me to make sure I was safe. Mobile phones did not exist. My family could not afford encyclopedias (until I was in high school) and so I was in the library or at the neighbors. It was good for me to learn about my educational options. The same is true today for people who lack the Internet. These children are learning what options exist. The world is full of educational options. This is a wide open learning world. Sure, the ideal world would have Internet access for all of humankind. It will come. Right now, we need to find kids the appropriate options.

Elaine: This is a reality of online learning, even though we are more open, mobile, and connected. I am always inspired by work and stories that seek to bring Internet access and educational options to the local community, because these open up so many opportunities. I remember fondly my first research project, which was about setting up a telecentre in the remote highlands of Borneo, East Malaysia in a place called Baro. The project was community based in collaboration with our research team and has since demonstrated the many opportunities Internet access can offer and ways the local community can leverage it to their advantage in a socioculturally appropriate manner. It has won international awards and serves as an example for other rural communities.

Good online instructors take the access challenge into account when planning their courses, considering the common or lowest denominator in terms of what technologies their students have access to. In many cultures, to be educated, to be able to learn and get a qualification, is a privilege, or the only way to better one's circumstance. I believe that students will find a way around their technology challenges, even if it means going to the library or McDonalds, Starbucks, etc., to access wi-fi. Human motivation is a powerful factor on the road to success.

7. Where do mobile technologies fit into the scheme of things?

Curt: They fit in where they work. Look at your objectives and see where they can play a role. I think too many people are infatuated with the technology like an iPad, instead of all the creative and highly generative tasks that are possible in education today with or without iPads.

Elaine: Mobile technologies are increasingly important in our connected and mobile lifestyle. Our team has just finished a project working with preschoolers and iPads, and we do not underestimate what these kids can do with the right tools and opportunities to extend their learning interests. Educators will need to step up to this challenge because it's not about merely placing the child in front of the tool but the quality interactions between the teacher and child and among the child and others that makes the difference in the child's learning. It all comes back to successfully bringing together the teaching, learning, and technology, not just the tech per se.

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**Book Reviews**

**Evidence, Digital Games, and the Future of Education**


**Reviewed by Kurt Squire**

Can video games save the world? Could digital games reinvent education, or are games simply the latest fad? Games, a Rorschach test for educators, reveal more about the interpreter than the phenomenon itself; whereas engineers see a design challenge, an opportunity for innovation and an untapped mechanism for achieving educational reform at scale, an instructional psychologist might see an overhyped medium, unsubstantiated by research. The contemporary field of games and learning is a collision of artists, technologists, designers, learning theorists, educators, cultural critics, investors, and scientists who bring different skills, goals, and value systems to these questions, which is partly why this sector captivates so many.

In *Computer Games for Learning: An Evidence-Based Approach*, Richard E. Mayer weighs in on these questions with a carefully considered synthesis of research that is a major advancement for the field. Based primarily on Mayer and colleagues' research, the book is a must-read for learning games researchers and a crowning achievement of decades of work. Coming from a positivist, experimentalist perspective, *Computer Games* provides a sound, internally coherent, empirically grounded treatise on games and learning.

*Computer Games* is organized into three sections: Introduction, Evidence, and Conclusions. Mayer posits three categories of research questions on games for learning: (1) value added questions (does adding a particular feature contribute to learning?), (2) cognitive consequences (what do

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Educational Technology: The Magazine for Managers of Change in Education is the world-renowned pioneer periodical in the field of technology in education and training. Published continuously since 1961, and now in its 55th year of distribution in more than one hundred countries worldwide, Ed Tech is regarded universally as the most important publication in this field.

Published six times annually, with each issue packed with solid, insightful, provocative, substantial papers by the leading experts in the field, the magazine offers what simply cannot be obtained in other magazines or journals. Ed Tech is available only as a print publication. Its contents always are carefully and thoughtfully reviewed and edited, so that only the finest, highest-quality papers are ever considered for publication. Ed Tech carries vital professional articles of undisputed merit.

The Editorial Function,

assuring that readers get only the highest-quality information and opinions — is alive and well at this one indispensable magazine!

Ed Tech has been the “flagship” publication of the field of educational technology since the early 1960s — the place to be published. Its editors have been instrumental in bringing about the very prominence that the term “educational technology” enjoys today in the world. The magazine title itself has been a registered trademark since the 1960s. All important movements in the field for more than five decades — from programmed learning, to computer-aided instruction, to instructional design, to performance technology, to interactive multimedia instruction, to e-learning, to constructivist learning environments, to the learning sciences, and on and on — have been covered at great length in the magazine’s pages. Most of the leading authors in the field today have come to international prominence via their papers in this magazine. The contents include the work of more than 50 distinguished, world-renowned Contributing Editors, who write regularly on all aspects of educational technology.

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