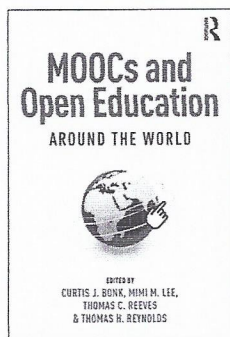


# Book Reviews



## Status and Potential of MOOCs and Open Learning Worldwide

*Book Review: Curtis J. Bonk, Mimi M. Lee, Thomas C. Reeves, and Thomas H. Reynolds, Editors.*

***MOOCs and Open Education Around the World.***  
Routledge; 397 pages; 2015; \$39.95 (hardcover, \$155.00).

### Reviewed by William D. Milheim

Over the past few years, Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs, have become a media buzzword, perceived as either promising free education for the masses, or alternatively, a lesser-quality educational experience loosely tied to traditional academic organizations. With this broad range of perceptions (by both students and instructors alike), it was clearly time to publish a comprehensive work which described this relatively new educational endeavor as well as the overarching field of open education. While other publications, primarily research and practitioner-oriented articles, have described this type of instruction in a variety of venues, *MOOCs and Open Education Around the World* describes the field from both broad and detailed perspectives as utilized in a variety of environments.

#### Book Contents

The first section of this 397-page edited book includes an introductory section of short reviews, two forewords including references, a well-written preface with references, and short bios about each editor. The primary content follows this introductory material and includes eight major sections with three to five chapters in each. The authors for these chapters come from a variety of perspectives and from countries around the globe. Finally, there is a comprehensive 17-page index at the end of the book, an important component considering the new ideas and technologies described here.

Part 1 (MOOCs and Open Education: Historical and

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*William D. Milheim, a Contributing Editor, is Emeritus Professor of Education at Penn State University. In three decades of work in higher education, he has been an instructional designer and academic administrator in addition to his service as a professor. Among his publications are numerous journal articles and book chapters, and he authored the first article on MOOCs published in this magazine: "Massive Open Online Courses: Current Applications and Future Potential," May-June issue, 2013. He is currently an educational consultant (e-mail: wdm2@psu.edu).*

Critical Reflections) includes three chapters, which introduce MOOCs in general while also including a case study of their utilization in the Open University of Japan. Part 2 (Open Education Opportunities Now and On the Horizon) continues the basic introduction of this topic, providing three additional chapters, which describe the historical context for MOOCs and open education as well as sample applications in Australia and South Africa.

The book changes focus with Part 3 (Researching and Evaluating Notions of MOOCs and Openness), which includes three chapters describing various distance methodologies as well as additional information related to the historical development of these tools. Part 4 (Thoughts on the Quality of MOOCs and OER) continues along somewhat similar lines, with three chapters discussing various issues related to the quality and pedagogy of these tools.

Design and development is the general topic for Part 5 (Designing Innovative Courses, Programs, and Models of Instruction), which includes five chapters discussing their utilization in higher education, student reactions, and teacher development, among several others. The next section—Part 6 (MOOCs and Open Education in the Developing World)—takes a somewhat different direction with its five chapters, focusing on topics related to the use of these tools in various international settings, including Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and Africa, among other topics.

The last two sections begin with Part 7 (MOOCs and Open Learning Alternatives in Corporate Settings), which includes three chapters related to the use of these tools in non-educational environments. Finally, Part 8 (Future Glimpses and Open Options) is composed of four chapters related to the broad future of MOOCs and open education, including a summary of the book by the editors.

#### Critique and Summary

The content of the book is current and well-organized, with a wealth of current references for most chapters (not surprising since this topic overall is quite new). The text is "dense" in many chapters—not including many tables or figures—and this may be a positive or a negative, depending on your needs for the book. In any case, all of the chapters are well-written and focus very clearly on the topics at hand.

The primary audience for this book includes MOOC developers, higher education faculty and administrators, and organizational leaders outside of higher education. While each of these groups would clearly benefit from reading the entire text, they may also benefit from choosing individual chapters to meet their specific needs.

The authors for the chapters are quite diverse in terms of their nationality, with most serving as academics in various university environments. Even with the diversity of nationalities, the chapters generally hold together well across the book, providing similar types of information (e.g., relevant literature, appropriate applications, etc.) even though the topics themselves vary considerably from one chapter to the next.

One of the most interesting chapters, particularly for MOOC developers and other instructional professionals, is Chapter 16—The Collaborative Design and Development of MOOCs for Teacher Professional Development. While the chapter is written with a focus on teacher education, the



basic concepts can be applied regardless of the specific environment. A second chapter in this same section—Unbundling Higher Education and the Georgia Tech Online MS in Computer Science—has similar applications for various fields.

Higher education faculty and administrators would benefit from a number of the chapters in Parts 1 and 2, with Chapter 2—The Single Canon: MOOCs and Academic Colonization—providing solid reading along these lines. As noted earlier, these sections also contain content relative to a number of individual contexts, including Japan (Chapter 3), Australia (Chapter 5), and Cape Town, South Africa (Chapter 6). Readers with less interest in MOOC development or higher education can benefit from a variety of other chapters, including those listed in Part 7, which describe MOOCs and other open learning alternatives in corporate settings.

Several other specific chapters are of particular note for all readers. Chapter 1 (The MOOC Misstep and the Open Education Infrastructure), for example, is well-written and also quite controversial, since it describes how MOOCs do not necessarily fit into the existing open education system—a very different opinion compared to the writings by most other chapter authors.

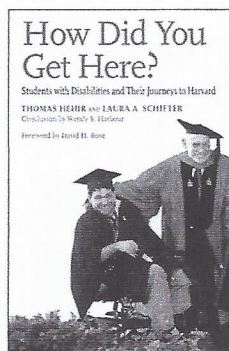
The other chapter of significant interest in the book is the final one—Open Options: Recapping This Book with Eyes on the Future—by the book's editors. This chapter provides a very solid recap of the book including its "Themes and Values" as well as an interesting section related to "Eyes on the Future." This is an excellent summary/synthesis of the book as a whole and would be particularly helpful to readers who choose to read only some of the chapters based on their job or personal needs.

While the overall book is quite impressive and does a fine job describing MOOCs and the related field of open education, there are questions that arise from its content. First, while the use of various terms is consistent within each chapter, questions may rise for readers of the full book. For example, while MOOCs are clearly defined and described, other terms, such as open education and distance education, are less clear and vary across chapters. While differences like this are to be expected with an edited book having so many chapters, some clarity with regard to these and other terms would have been helpful.

The larger question, however, is whether readers (or potential readers) have already moved on from one of the primary foci of the book—MOOCs. These open learning alternatives are obviously not the only topic in this comprehensive text, but they are clearly a major focus. Several years ago (an eon in technology-based teaching and learning), MOOC-based tools were very much up-and-coming, and many thought they would become a major force for distance-based learners. However, as with other forms of technology-based instruction, potential students may now be moving on to other open education options in this area. The "jury is still out" along these lines, but this is certainly a potential concern for the book as it currently stands.

In conclusion, *MOOCs and Open Education Around the World* stands out as a comprehensive and analytical description of this subject for readers in a variety of different

contexts. While there is some concern about the current and future prevalence of specific tools (e.g., MOOCs), the work still provides a wealth of information from numerous authorities in the field related to open education options for students who choose to learn using this instructional format. □



## Helping Students with Disabilities to Succeed in Education

*Book Review: Thomas Hehir, Laura A. Schifter, and Wendy S. Harbour.*

***How Did You Get Here? Students with Disabilities***

***and Their Journeys to Harvard.*** Harvard Education Press; 264 pages; 2015; \$35.00 (hardcover, \$70.00).

### Reviewed by Michael F. Shaughnessy

*How Did You Get Here?* is an immensely readable book with many insights about the current state of education in America, specifically for those students with special needs. Thomas Hehir, Laura A. Schifter, and Wendy S. Harbour have shared the stories of 16 students who made it to Harvard University in spite of various exceptionalities (dyslexia, vision and hearing problems, spastic cerebral palsy, etc.).

The stories are fascinating, informative, and educational. At first glance, I suspected that the book would extol technology and its key role in these pupils' accomplishments. Not so. The authors clearly demarcate numerous factors and variables that have contributed to these students' success. Beginning with "my mom," the stories go on to tell about "the teachers who believed in me" and the speech pathologists that encouraged them, and the audiologists who mentored and nurtured, and in some instances, the private residential schools that provided needed services; and interestingly enough, extracurricular activities—such

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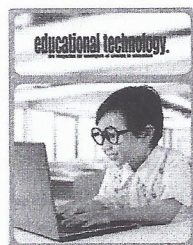




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A general issue covering varied aspects of educational technology

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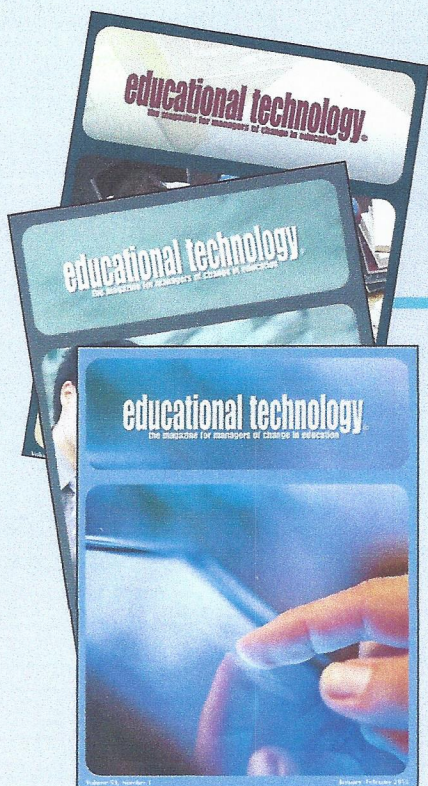
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