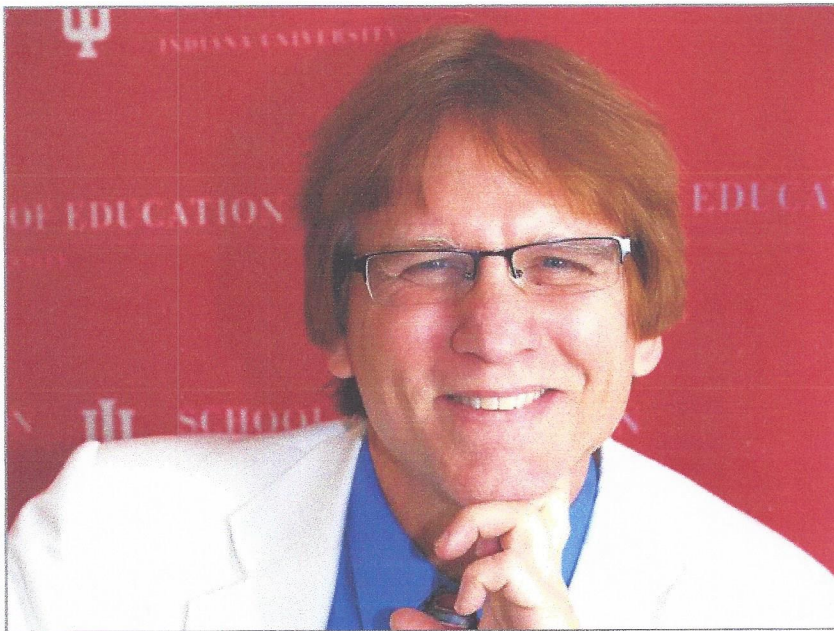




PROFILES

Curt Bonk

By George Nantwi
August 31, 2015



Curt Bonk is a professor in the School of Education and adjunct in the School of Informatics at Indiana University. He is also the president of [CourseShare](#), a site dedicated to providing resources for educators. He has a background as a corporate controller, educational psychologist, and instructional technologist. Bonk received the CyberStar Award from the Indiana Information Technology Association. He is a well-known authority on emerging technologies for learning; and he reflects on his speaking experiences around the world on his popular blog, [TravelinEdMan](#). He has authored several widely used technology books, including *The World Is Open: How Web Technology Is Revolutionizing Education* (2009), and *Adding Some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ Activities for Motivating and Retaining Learners Online* (2014), which is free to download in English and Chinese..

How did your educational trajectory and past professional experience shape your current work?

No such life question is ever easy; however, I can unequivocally say that my past professional experiences played a monumental role in shaping my current work in higher education. For instance, my college summers in 1979 and 1980 were spent at Square D Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I got to work with pretty much everyone in the company including management, purchasing, engineering, production control, safety, shop foreman, and guys doing the

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welding and operating some highly technical machines. I learned many interpersonal skills for working with people of all walks of life, and along the way I learned about microchip technology.

I also spent two or so years working at a high technology company in Brookfield (a suburb of Milwaukee) called Automated Systems, Inc. (ASI) in the early 1980s. At ASI, we designed and fabricated some of the most dense printed circuit boards in the world; we also leased out the use of this software. As a smallish \$10 million company that had just gone public, each of us employees had many hats to wear. In addition to being the assistant controller in this company, I played a role in personnel and HR. As part of those responsibilities, I managed our software contracts for major companies around the world (e.g., our clients included Hughes Aircraft, GE, Wang, Westinghouse, etc.). In addition, I was involved in putting all the financial records on a computer platform using a timesharing system. I was soon experimenting with generating new types of financial reports and projections on a personal computer using Visicalc and Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet software. I think it was 1985 when I purchased my first PC; a rather heavy and clunky machine with quite limited RAM memory (48K?).

I wanted ASI to start using personal computers, but I fought too many battles with management that only believed what came out of a mainframe computer. We were a "True Blue" IBM mainframe shop all the way. So I decide that I needed to try something else. I took night courses as well as television and correspondence courses to qualify for graduate school in educational psychology at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Shortly after I arrived at Wisconsin in January winter of 1986, I was hired by Dr. Bob Clasen of the UW Outreach and Extension division to help design a telecourse on critical thinking for K-12 teachers. Not too surprisingly, about two years after I left ASI, it went out of business. They could not change with the times.

And me? Fast forward more than three decades later and you will find that my research and writings intersect business, technology, psychology, and education. In particular, I am interested in open access to learning; unlike the exceedingly closed access that more accurately defines my former profession of accounting. Today I am researching how people are using open educational resources, open courseware, e-learning, and things like massive open online courses (MOOCs) experience some type of life change, just as mine had changed. Much of these interests today in nontraditional forms of learning as enhanced by technology stem from those early years at ASI, Square D, and several other companies—they formed the basis for my interests.

How do you hope your work will change the learning landscape?

At the core of my work, you will see that I am attempting to capture life stories of change resulting from the use of learning technology or open educational resources. We are in an age where many aspects of learning are changing. Learning today is much more open, blended, visual, collaborative, informal, massive, personal, global, mobile, self-directed, modifiable, instantaneous, and ubiquitous than when I was first entering graduate school. The learning changes that I just listed are just some of the 30 learning changes that I have been highlighting in my recent keynote and invited talks. Much has changed in the learning world since I decided to major in human learning three decades ago.

While people repeatedly talk about each of these learning and technology trends, they really have not grasped what they mean when combined. We are in the midst of a learning revolution or transformation. Make no mistake, we are members of the learning century. Each new technology announcement gets people excited and clamoring for more, but I really doubt that most people (including politicians who fund it and educators who use it) fully grasp the implications and ramifications of learning via online or blended approaches. I believe that stories of life change from mobile learning pursuits or from open access to course content can enhance such understandings and may quicken the pace of change.

I try to do two things to change the learning landscape: write books, design videos, and give presentations for those in the trenches of online or blended teaching and learning (i.e., online instructors and instructional designers); and write books, give keynote talks, and conduct research on the big picture aspects of the learning revolution or transformation that we currently are all experiencing. These efforts are intended for administrators, educators, parents, politicians, and other education stakeholders. Stated another way, I try to talk to practitioners as well as researchers and scholars about the opportunities in front of us. I am fortunate to have worked with people in the military as well as corporate training, K-12 educators, higher education personnel, and consultants. I believe that this is the most important and fastest changing learning era ever in the history of humankind. In an odd way, my previous life as a CPA and corporate controller enabled me to see this long before the Web was invented or there was any notion of a wiki, OER, or MOOCs. MIT had yet to make their bold proclamation that education can and should be free, but that was definitely part of the reason that I went back to graduate school—to help free up education.

What broad trends do you think will have the most impact on learning in the years ahead?

Open education, free education, and pervasive education. How can they not? We have entered a time in which educational content is no longer controlled by a few large publishing houses. Today, there is mounting access to learning for learners everywhere. The one caveat is that they must have unrestricted access to the Internet or to someone who has such access.

Notice that I did not mention a specific technology. Too often our visions of learning are scoped by the latest technology trend or something on the near horizon. From what has transpired during the past 10-15 years, it seems a safe bet that free and open educational content and experiences will continue to impact mega-millions of people as they first acquire Internet access and then learn how to utilize open content. Just think about what has happened recently in terms of the volume of people accessing MOOCs each month or the untold numbers of young people perusing open educational content from prominent (as well as less well known institutions) of higher learning in search of a possible college major. Undoubtedly, some of this learning will be credentialed and increasingly included in learner profiles in the coming decade.

What are you currently working on & what is your next big project?

My colleagues and I recently edited a book on [MOOCs and Open Education Around the World](#) that was published in late June 2015 by Routledge. This edited volume contains the work of around 64 contributors from 13 countries that resulted in 32 articles counting the foreword and the two prefaces. See my blog post for details: "[MOOCs and Open Education](#)" [Book and Special](#)

[Issue...Now Published...AND also Published!](#) My fabulous co-editing team included Mimi Lee from the University of Houston, Tom Reeves from The University of Georgia, and Tom Reynolds from National University. We also have a special journal issue on the same topic that was published a few days ago in the *International Journal on E-Learning* (IJEL) journal, which is part of Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). There were eight articles in the special issue; hence, we have been writing, editing, and introducing some 40 articles during the past year. That is enough.

Both of these projects grew out of a preconference symposium that we coordinated back in the fall of 2013 at the International E-Learn Conference in Las Vegas run by AACE. Our hope is that these two projects can combine to provide information about the state of MOOCs and open education in various parts of the planet. Admittedly, this is but a partial glimpse; still, we hope it is an informative and inspiring one. I am also working on articles on informal learning with open access contents and self-directed online learning. In some ways, I am attempting to capture life change from access to open content. I also have a project on K-12 teacher global education pedagogical practices and professional development for such.

My next project will be a book on blended learning but it will be much more than that. I am tentatively calling it, "*Education 20/20: Visions of Blended Learning Ideas and Beyond*." I will start with 20 new roles of instructors (e.g., concierge, knowledge curator, learning consultant) and it will end with my 20 "last principles" of instruction (e.g., the Principle of Spontaneity, the Principle of Sharing, the Principle of Choice and Options, etc.). If I am successful, it will read more like a book for the beach or a teaching and learning philosophy book rather than a textbook.

Who are the most interesting people you are following on Twitter (if you have a Twitter account)?

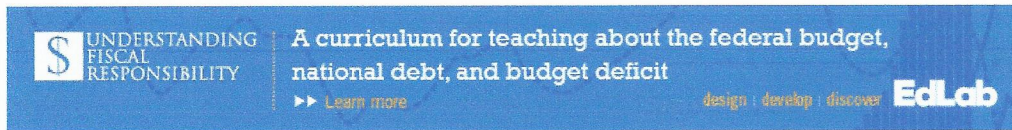
Yes, I have a [Twitter account](#). I only follow one person on Twitter and that is [Aaron Doering](#) from the University of Minnesota. Aaron is known for his research on adventure learning; hence, his posts are often topical, controversial, current, and intriguing. He has a keen pulse on integrating environmental, climatological, and political reports and activities into the curriculum. You can find him in a tent at 30 below zero interacting via Web conferencing with youth around the world about his research projects and daily encounters. Aaron is someone who understands how the internet is a learning tool for millions of young people around the planet. At the same time, he pushes the forms and types of learning with each expedition that he embarks upon. As such, he is the ideal person to follow in Twitter and become inspired by.

Image: Courtesy Curt Bonk

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ABOUT

The New Learning Times (NLT) provides daily coverage of the transformation of learning opportunities in the information age for those shaping the future of education. NLT is produced at the EdLab at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The editorial frame for NLT is governed by our understanding of three major trends, which we have termed “The New 3R’s.” Far beyond mere reform, the education sector is undergoing a major Reformation, a profound reconfiguration of the customs, institutions, and relationships that together constitute the foundations for learning opportunities around the world. Spurred by rapid developments in communications and computation, the education sector is also experiencing a Renaissance of new ideas, processes, and possibilities to support learning across the lifespan. The rapid introduction and convergence of these emerging political, technical, and artistic forces is creating the conditions for a Revolution in what is becoming the new learning sector. The New Learning Times seeks to chronicle the major transformation in learning possibilities.

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