

ALYSSA ARBUCKLE

ON MOOCS AND OPEN EDUCATION AROUND THE WORLD, EDITED BY CURTIS J. BONK, MIMI M. LEE, THOMAS C. REEVES, AND THOMAS H. REYNOLDS

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In *MOOCs and Open Education Around the World*, editors Curtis J. Bonk, Mimi M. Lee, Thomas C. Reeves, and Thomas H. Reynolds bring together 29 chapters on Massive Open Online Courses, widely known as “MOOCS.” The collection aims for depth and breadth, and there are many different MOOC and MOOC-like initiatives detailed, as well as a couple of notable alternatives to MOOCs. This collection is situated squarely in the realm of Open Education and its affiliated Open Educational Resources, or OERs (acronym soup indeed). The collection is rife with the language of Open Education: these are transformational times, and we need to meet them with transformational pedagogy.

The collection incorporates chapters from 69 authors who write from around the world, and many of the pieces are case studies from specific countries or regions (Abas; Aoki; Bandalaria and Alfonso; Bossu, Bull, and Brown; Czerniewicz, Cox, Hodgkinson-Williams, and Willmers; Hartnett, Brown, and Wilson; Jagannathan). Most of the 69 authors hold academic positions, although there are 3 who identify as entrepreneurs and 4 who work for not-for-profit or government-aligned organizations. Regardless of the 3 entrepreneur authors included, none of the authors herald from any of the big name MOOC providers like Coursera or Udacity. This

lends the collection a unique position: many authors are pro-MOOC, but they do not serve to profit to the same degree as the companies who focus on Open Education as a new market for capital generation.

Authors range in opinion on the value of MOOCs, in their current manifestation. Two divergent chapters stood out for me in this regard: “Feminist Alternatives to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs): The Inception of the Distributed Open Collaborative Course (DOCC),” by Erika M. Berhmann, Radhika Gajjala, Elizabeth Losh, T.L. Cowan, Penelope Boyer, Jasmine Rault, Laura Waxler, and CL Cole, and “Harnessing the Power of Open Learning to Share Global Prosperity and Eradicate Poverty,” by Sheila Jagannathan.

Berhmann et al. take the position that MOOCs efface many of the key values of feminist pedagogy. For instance, MOOCs often present a version of cultural homogeneity by providing Western content (often delivered by a “Western,” read: white, cast of instructors) to large student audiences in the Global South. MOOCs rarely connect individuals with instructors, eliding any possibilities for personalized learning. They also happen entirely online, which means that face-to-face, in-person communication and connection is impossible. Inherently, MOOCs aim for a dispersed, ideally international scope, rather than focus on local needs and participants. Some of these concerns are raised by other authors in the collection, perhaps most notably by Karen Head in “The Single Canon: MOOCs and Academic Colonization.”

By contrast, Jagannathan touts the immense value of open, free-to-access education for developing nations. She celebrates the opportunities MOOCs bear to eradicate poverty through sharing information widely. Jagannathan’s promotion of MOOCs comes with a couple of caveats, however: she argues that MOOCs can only be fully effective if they are developed in consultation with regional community members who can advise on the accessibility and relevance of information being shared, especially around farming and land use. She also suggests that all courses be developed for low bandwidth, in order to meet the infrastructural reality of participants. (Of note, Jagannathan writes from her perspective as the Lead Learning Specialist and Program Manager of the e-Institute, World Bank Institute, and the capacity-building initiatives going on there.)

The two opinions espoused by Berhmann et al. and Jagannathan are representative of a central tension that runs throughout the collection; namely, how do we implement systems that provide accessible educational resources and experiences to people in both an ethical and efficient manner? Such a weighty tension raises issues of scale, sustainability, and cultural

relations, and it is not likely to be resolved any time soon.

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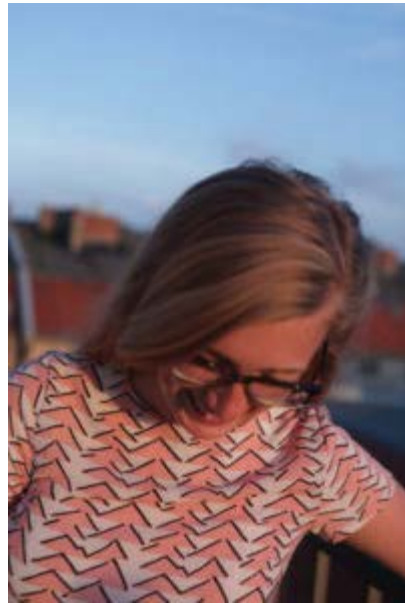
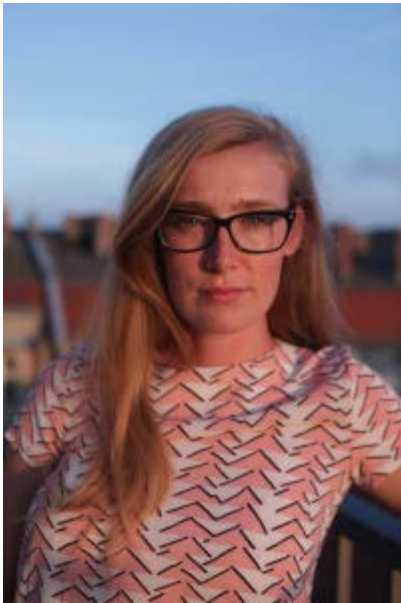
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