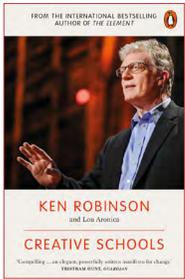


Two book reviews this issue, both by Dave Lehman

Creative Schools, by Robinson & Aronica



Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution that's Transforming Education
by Sir Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica
New York: Penguin Press, 2015

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Many *Connections* readers will be familiar with Sir Ken Robinson already through his 2006 TED talk, “Do Schools Kill Creativity?,” currently the most-watched talk in the history of TED.com, viewed online more than 41 million times. (You are familiar with the TED Conference’s free collection of short Ideas Worth Spreading, right?) As Robinson says in the introduction to *Creative Schools*, “The essence of that talk was that we’re all born with immense natural talents, but by the time we’ve been through education far too many of us have lost touch with them.” He also states in the introduction, “In this book, I want to set out how the standards culture is harming students and schools and to present a different

way of thinking about education. I want to show, too, that whoever and wherever you are, you do have the power to make the system change. Changes are happening. All around the world, there are many great schools, wonderful teachers, and inspiring leaders who are working creatively to provide students with the kinds of personalized, compassionate, and community-oriented education they need.”

With a doctorate in liberal and performing arts from the renowned Bretton Hall in the West Riding of Yorkshire, Robinson has worked for 40 years as a teacher, researcher, trainer, examiner, and advisor. He sees the following as the central issue in worldwide education, in a nutshell:

“... most of the developed countries did not have mass systems of public education much before the middle of the nineteenth century. These systems were developed to meet the labor needs of the Industrial Revolution and they are organized on the principles of mass production. The standards movement is allegedly focused on making these systems more efficient and accountable. The problem is that these systems are inherently unsuited to the wholly different circumstances of the twenty-first century.... The revolu-

tion I’m advocating is based on different principles from those of the standards movement. It is based on a belief in the value of the individual, the right to self-determination, our potential to evolve and live a fulfilled life, and the importance of civic responsibility and respect for others.... [Thus] the aims of education are to enable students to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens. [emphasis mine]”

As he says in the book’s subtitle, what’s needed is a “grassroots revolution” from the ground up, from the students, teachers, administrators, and parent/caregivers in local communities, and not by re-forming the system, but (again, as he says in his subtitle) by trans-forming it.

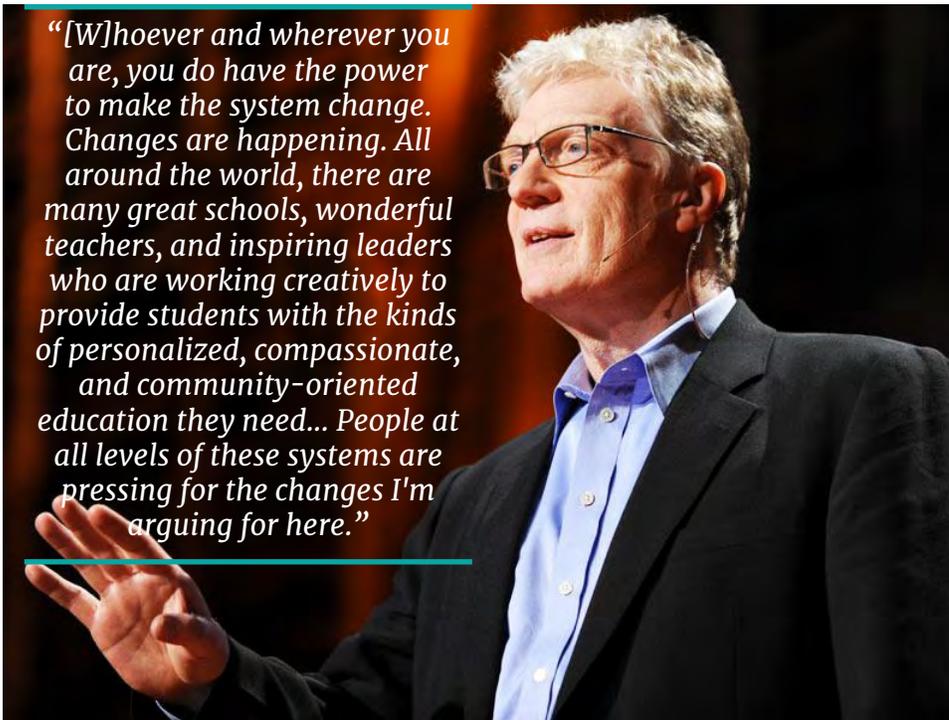
Robinson lived and worked in England until 2001 when he came to the United States. He says this is a global issue, and draws on examples from England and the U.S. as well as other countries involved in transforming education. One example is the U.K. project he and others researched, and which resulted in the report, “The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practices and Provision.” Drawing on all of the arts, but particularly drama, the study concludes:

“... the heart of education is the relationship between the student and the teacher [emphasis mine]. Everything else depends on how productive and successful that relationship is. If that is not working, then the system is not working.... A great deal of learning – and education – goes on outside the formal setting of schools and national curricula. It happens anywhere there are willing learners and engaging teachers. The challenge is to create and sustain those experiences within schools. The root task is to create

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“[W]hoever and wherever you are, you do have the power to make the system change. Changes are happening. All around the world, there are many great schools, wonderful teachers, and inspiring leaders who are working creatively to provide students with the kinds of personalized, compassionate, and community-oriented education they need... People at all levels of these systems are pressing for the changes I’m arguing for here.”



the conditions in which the relationship between student and teachers can flourish.”

Robinson then goes on to point out that this kind of transformation of education exists within a “natural ecosystem of responsibilities:”

“At the most fundamental level, the focus of education has to be on creating the conditions in which students will want and be able to learn.

Next, the role of teachers is to facilitate students’ learning.

The role of principals is to create the conditions in their schools in which teachers can fulfill these roles.

The role of policymakers [e.g. school board members] is to create conditions – whether at the local, state, or national levels for which they are responsible – in which principals and schools can fulfill these responsibilities.”

The Arts in Schools project also published “Learning Through Drama,” which identified four areas of “creative, technical, contextual, and critical development” involved in drama productions, noting that these four applied equally well to all other disciplines including the sciences, hu-

manities, and even physical education. For example, in drama the report argued that there are two complementary ways of engaging students in the arts: “making” – the production of their own work, and “appraising” – understanding and appreciating the work of others, and that both of these are vital to a dynamic and balanced education in the arts.

“Making” involves both the individual student’s creative voice and the technical skills through which it is expressed, while “appraising” involves a deepening contextual knowledge and critical judgment of others people’s work, both artistic and aesthetic. Achieving such a balance requires teachers to “engage, enable, expect, and empower” their students, which Robinson then discusses in detail using examples from various teachers in various fields. One example I particularly appreciated is from teaching horsemanship, since as a high school student I learned to ride and worked at a stable. The instructor’s comment to the students was, “You can’t ride yesterday’s horse,” pointing out how a rider has to keep learning from what the horse is doing in the present moment, not simply what the horse was

doing yesterday. I believe this lesson is certainly widely applicable beyond ridership.

In the chapter entitled, “What’s Worth Knowing?”, Robinson notes, *“The proper starting point is to ask what students should know and be able to do as a result of their education.”* [This is exactly what we did at the Lehman Alternative Community School when we asked the question, “What should students know and be able to do to become global citizens!” Our question led to a list generated by staff, students, and parent/caregivers, of seven essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes of an LACS graduate.] Robinson identifies the following eight core competencies:

“curiosity – the ability to ask questions and explore how the world works

creativity – the ability to generate new ideas and to apply them in practice

criticism – the ability to analyze information and ideas and to form reasoned arguments and judgments

communication – the ability to express thoughts and feelings clearly and confidently in a range of media and forms

collaboration – the ability to work constructively with others

compassion – the ability to empathize with others and act accordingly

composure – the ability to connect with the inner life of feeling and develop a sense of personal harmony and balance

citizenship – the ability to engage constructively with society and to participate in the processes that sustain it”

He then provides examples from various schools of each of these, and ends this discussion with the following three characteristics of the curriculum as a whole:

“Diversity – It should be broadly based to cover the sorts of understanding that we want for all students and to provide proper opportunities for them as individuals to discover their personal strengths and interests.

Depth – It should provide appropriate choices so that as they develop, students can pursue their own interests in proper depth.

Dynamism – The curriculum should be designed to allow for collaboration and interaction between students of different ages and teachers with different specialties. It should build bridges with the wider community, and it should evolve and develop in the process.”

There are additional chapters

on testing, pointers for principals, changing the school climate and an afterword in which Robinson notes three key things: “*First, there is a rapidly changing context in which we are living that makes it urgent that these approaches are properly understood and applied on a mass scale. Second, we now have technologies that make it possible to personalize education in wholly new ways. Third, there is a groundswell of feeling in many parts of the world that a tectonic shift in how we think about and*

practice education is essential.”

It is this second point which is a perfect segue to my second book review in this issue of *Connections*.

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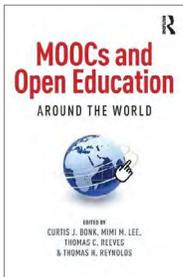
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Robinson's TED Talk: “Do Schools Kill Creativity?”

Book review #2, also by Dave Lehman

MOOCs and Open Education Around the World

By Curtis J. Bonk, Mimi M. Lee, Thomas C. Reeves, Thomas H. Reynolds, editors



MOOCs and Open Education Around the World

Edited by Curtis J. Bonk, Mimi M. Lee, Thomas C. Reeves, and Thomas H. Reynolds

New York: Routledge, 2015

This book is an amazingly thorough, up-to-date, incredibly important, encyclopedic review of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Open Educational Resources (OER), and Distance Learning (see sidebar for links to definitions). Organized into eight sections of 32 articles by 64 contributors from 15 different countries, thoroughly fulfilling the “Around the World” promise of the title. Authors include voices from Australia, Canada, Germany, Kenya, India, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The book includes two insightfully written Forewords: one by George Siemens, known for teaching the first MOOC in 2011, and another by Fred

Mulder of the Open University of the Netherlands. Mulder points out that UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) coined the term, OER in 2001. Also, there is an introductory Preface by the team of four Editors, and a Closing chapter by the Editors as well. **In fact, I strongly suggest you begin reading this book with the final chapter, number 29, “Open Options: Recapping This Book with Eyes on the Future,” to assist you in selecting what chapter to read next.** (I know, I know, it’s “cheating” to read the last chapter of a novel first, but this is non-fiction and full of important information that can seem overwhelming to read front-to-back.)

From the initial Foreword, Siemens makes the important point that “MOOCs were never about higher education,” college and university education solely. They were a response to larger societal needs related to education and training, and such information tools as Google search, Wikipedia, and social media in the globally connected 21st century. He goes on to recount the following crucial example:

“Consider the SARS outbreak of 2003.

In a connected world, disease travels more quickly. So does information, as indicated by the rapid response of medical researchers to identify the virus causing SARS. While science often moves in multi-year cycles of peer review research and publication, identifying and understanding how to deal with SARS was a critical emergency. In a span of only a few months, the identification of the coronavirus enabled medical professionals to explore treatment and offer solutions. The speed of this research was only possible in a connected, networked, and online world.”

In their Preface, the four editors—from Indiana University, the University of Houston, the University of Georgia, and National University—make the important multicultural point, “*We hope that this book starts a dialogue about how MOOCs and open education might accelerate access to education by those living in poverty or without adequate access to traditional educational resources as well as those coveting a move up in their careers or starting a new one.*” The 29 chapters of *MOOCs and Open Education Around the World* are organized into the following eight parts:

Part 1 – MOOCs and Open Education: Historical and Critical Reflections

Part 2 – Open Education Opportunities Now and On the Horizon

Part 3 – Researching and Evaluating Notions of MOOCs and Openness

Part 4 – Thoughts on the Quality of MOOCs and OER

Part 5 – Designing Innovative, Courses, Programs, and Models of Instruction

Part 6 – MOOCs and Open Education in the Developing World

Part 7 – MOOCs and Open Learning Alternatives in Corporate Settings

Part 8 – Future Glimpses and Open Options

These sections are designed to meet the following ten goals of the editors:

- “Help the reader better understand the range of MOOC initiatives and open education projects currently underway around the planet.
- Understand how MOOCs and open educational resources are impacting learners in different ways around the world. This goal includes obtaining a better grasp of the potential global impact of MOOCs and open education.
- Highlight pressing issues and controversies where there presently is passionate debate.
- Reflect on and plan for near-term possibilities, obstacles, and trends related to MOOCs and open education.
- Gain insights into emerging trends in e-learning as well as future plans and visions, especially as they relate to MOOCs and informal or self-directed learning.
- Learn how culture interacts with e-learning and open education across regions of the world.
- Emotionally connect to the stories, experiences, pilot testing situations, etc., of those who have attempted a MOOC or developed significant open educational

resources.

- Grasp the challenges and barriers facing different organizations and institutions as well as entire countries in implementing MOOCs and other forms of e-learning and open education.
- Learn from some of the key instructors, trainers, researchers, administrators, government officials, instructional designers, entrepreneurs, consultants, and for the reader to get a sense of who some of the key players currently are in this space as well as what issues they are attempting to address.
- Realize that many of the questions, criticisms, possibilities, and opportunities related to MOOCs and open education are global issues. While the contributors to this book represent diverse regions of the world, they have much in common in terms of their concerns, goals, initiatives, challenges, problems and successes.”

Illustrative of the thoughtful discussions in each chapter, and of particular interest in Part 5 are Chapter 16, “The Collaborative Design and Development of MOOCs for Teacher Professional Development,” written by two professors from the University of Houston, and Chapter 17, “Feminist Alternatives to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs): The Inception of the Distributed Open Collaborative Course (DOCC),” co-authored by eight feminist educators.

In Chapter 16 the authors describe the “Webscape model” for developing web-based, multimedia-enhanced educational environments with the following five components –

“First, students, faculty and content experts work collaboratively in small teams to design and develop multimedia-rich educational projects.

Second, we use a range of technology tools and resources, including sophisticated multimedia authoring programs, dynamic databases, digital storytelling software, and advanced uses of digital video editing.

Third, we create actual projects that will be used by real teachers and students, as well as Web visitors from around the world.

Fourth, Webscape projects use a constructivist, team-based approach to instructional design (IL).

Fifth, because the Webscape projects are complex and multifaceted, they often cannot be completed in a single semester. As a result, work on such projects often continues throughout the school year.”

In Chapter 17, the DOCC, “Distributed Open Collaborative Course,” is a collaborative project motivated by feminist pedagogical insights utilizing recent advances in learning technology with “shared learning tools,” and “shared learning activities.” DOCC and FemTechNet initially involved some 200 students on 18 college campuses with 27 instructors. All but two students successfully completed the initial, trial course.

Finally, in closing the last chapter, the editors repeat the important statement they made in the Preface – “we hope that this book provides some guidance toward an educational future where options and access are open for all learners – the highly inquisitive, informal, and nontraditional learners as well as the educationally disadvantaged, underprivileged, and at-risk.” I encourage you readers of *Connections* to take the time to become familiar with the crucial topics in this book as we look increasingly to a digitally dominated age.



LINKS

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