Reviews
Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, and Doing, by Curtis J. Bonk and Ke Zhang. New York, NY: Jossey-Bass, 2008,
320 pages, soft cover.
and,
Adding Some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ Activities for Motivating and Retaining Learners Online,
by Curtis J. Bonk and Elaine Khoo, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014
382 pages, paperback or digital (Kindle book)
Reviewed by Robert F. Bromber, Marine Corps University

It could be argued that Curtis J. Bonk helped bring online learning, hybridization, and teaching with technology from its oft-timed reviled infancy to its modern day standing as a recognized necessity in our pedagogical toolboxes. Early on, he recognized the importance of evolving digital resources and processes in *Electronic Collaborators: Learner-centered Technologies for Literacy, Apprenticeship, and Discourse* (Routledge, 1998) a book, considered by many at the time, to be filled with "new-fangled" ideas. He then followed that publication with a string of seminal publications on blended (hybrid) learning, disruptive technology, and learning theory.

In the two decades since, Bonk has become a major thought leader in this ground-breaking territory serving as one of only a few regular features at international conferences and workshops spanning numerous disciplinary domains. Bonk's experiences abroad as well as the growing acceptance and adoption of his methods led to *The World Is Open: How Web Technology is Revolutionizing Education* (2009). His title was prophetic as demonstrated by a Google search for Curt Bonk: it returned 425,000 hits, many in languages other than English. Many of the sites I found through this search represent Bonk's willingness to both share his work and collaborate with others. This is particularly apparent in the proliferation of "how to" YouTube videos.

Bonk's outward flamboyance belies the seriousness of his work in both the theoretical and practical domains. He finds a balance between theory and classroom realty. This unique quality produces highly readable works that deliver immense value for practitioners, course developers, and people working with faculty development programs. As a result, I have chosen to review two of Bonk's books to share as resources I believe should be in every management educator/practitioner's library: *Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, and Doing* co-authored by Dr. Ke Zhang (Jossey-Bass, 2008), and *Adding Some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ Activities for Motivating and Retaining Learners Online,* (Amazon Digital Services, 2014).

In a 2009 book review of *Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, and Doing,* Linda Kuk enthusiastically reported that "This book is clearly designed to be a "finger-tip" resource for faculty involved in technology-based instruction"(*The Review of Higher Education, 2009).*[1] As with many

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[1] Kuk, Linda. "Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, and Doing" by Curtis J. Bonk and Ke Zhang, *The Review of Higher Education* Vol. 32, Num.4, Summer 2009

other reviewers, Kuk saw the work as a practical tool for professionals who are charged with translating an idea into engaging content that students, as the end users, will not only understand but be able to retain and apply.

Bonk and Zhang's *Empowering Online Learning* uses a mnemonic device - a Bonk signature – that resonates with teachers and students alike. In this case, a beloved movie icon is employed: R2D2. The initials stand for read, reflect, display, and do. While the book is aimed at online educators, anyone using digital resources to deliver course content would benefit. The strategies covered by the authors take into consideration all types of learners: auditory, visual, observational, reflective, verbal, tactile, as well as kinesthetic. These models provide the framework for each component R2D2 strategy. There are unique matrixes that provide quick indices delineating skill sets, potential activities, possible pitfalls, and time on task to deploy the strategy. Over 100 practical examples of content delivery can be found inside the books that are easy to understand, adapt, and apply - no matter the discipline.

At the time *Empowering Online Learning* came to press, some emerging technologies were literally unknown to many professional educators. Since then, wikis, blogs, Second Life, and other revolutionary programs and robust learning management systems, have become the norm. These new ideas and delivery mechanisms have crept into the traditional classroom by way of hybrid, blended, and computer assisted learning models. Although *Empowering Online Learning* is still an essential read, the blinding speed of technological evolution, the changing face of the contemporary student, and the proliferation of new teaching tools demands a new look at the field. For Bonk, this new look came in spring of 2104 with *Adding Some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ Activities for Motivating and Retaining Learners Online.*

TEC-VARIETY is not a rehash of *Empowering Online Learning.* It incorporates theory espoused in the prior work but focuses on breathing some life into online content which Bonk and Khoo declare flat, moribund, and uninspiring. They correctly point out that "bland and unimaginative activities" render any motivation a student brings to a course dampened, or worse, destroyed.

The authors take educators to task for falling behind technologies that students most often use to gather information and engage: smartphones, tablets, and other wireless and mobile technologies. If there is any doubt that the technology changed dramatically between the two books discussed here, remember that the iPhone debuted less than one year before *Empowering Online Learning.* Tablets, while invented in 1956, did not gain market acceptance until 2010 with the release of the Apple iPad. From a technology standpoint, *TEC-VARIETY* fosters an entirely new conversation as the authors wed these new communication devices to sound pedagogy and exciting content delivery.

I should note here that the book is not all about eye-catching graphics and "edutainment," rather; both authors base their ideas in well-founded learning theory, educational psychology, and results-driven research. Their credentials are impeccable. Again, Bonk employs the mnemonic to grab attention: *TEC-VARIETY.* The acronym essentially explains the premise of the book:

- **T**one/Climate: Psychological Safety, Comfort, Sense of Belonging.
- **E**ncouragement: Feedback, Responsiveness, Praise, Supports.
- **C**uriosity: Surprise, Intrigue, Unknowns.
- **V**ariety: Novelty, Fun, Fantasy.
- **A**utonomy: Choice, Control, Flexibility, Opportunities.
- **R**elevance: Meaningful, Authentic, Interesting.
- **I**nteractivity: Collaborative, Team-Based, Community.

- **E**ngagement: Effort, Involvement, Excitement.
- **T**ension: Challenge, Dissonance, Controversy
- **Y**ielding Products: Goal Driven, Purposeful Vision, Ownership

The themes above are not discussed until Chapter 4 of the book. The first three chapters provide an overview of the current theory of motivating all of the stakeholders in the online or hybrid environment-I would argue Bonk and Khoo commentary are applicable in traditional trainng or learning spaces as well. There is an in depth discussion-both theoretical and practical- of attrition and retention, especially in the online milieu. This topic is currently a huge issue as the MOOC arguments evolve. The first thirty-one pages decidedly set the stage for the remaining chapters of the book and act as a stand-alone primer.

Chapter 1, for instance, delivers a synopsis of R2D2 from *Empowering Online Learning* as well as the theoretical underpinnings used in its design. The authors clearly describe the goals and potential uses of the book. While the strategies mentioned target mainly online faculty and students, there is no question that with modification much of the advice easily transfers to the computer supported classroom environment as well.

The material in Chapter 2 should become required reading for aspiring online instructors or anyone involved in the development of curriculum beginning with a course (or training) concept through to creation, deployment, and assessment. The chapter offers two invaluable tables that diagnose attrition and retention in the online milieu. Preemptive and remedial strategies covered are institutional, pedagogical, and technical. The scope informs the reader who may only live in any one of these realms from a student counselor to a brand-new teaching assistant as well as the teaching professional.

Motivation, the main thrust of Chapter 3, sets the theoretical framework for the balance of *TEC-VARIETY* by engaging four learning theories: Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, and Sociocultural Views. These four topics contain related principles and concepts with current research by recognizable thought leaders. The discussion emphasizes a varied approach rather than cleaving to a single model while retaining openness to experimentation. This discussion goes to the very heart of the theoretical constructs that Bonk and Khoo correctly propose; namely, that all stakeholders must embrace a degree of experimentation in their course design with a goal of forming a cohesive community which is essential to learning.

Throughout my fifteen years of experience in teaching in online and hybrid formats, I have discovered that meaningful feedback, swift responses, praise, and support means a great deal to the students. Chapter 5 covers these aspects with highly effective tools, techniques, and exercises for both synchronous and asynchronous formats. This chapter alone should be required reading for the traditional instructor transitioning into the online or hybrid environment or the freshly minted PhD (that rarely comes to their new job with formal "how-to-teach" training).

Chapters 6 and 7 are pure Bonk – arousing curiosity through variety. Anyone who has watched Bonk's prolific YouTube collection, or better yet, experienced him in a live format will come away with the inevitable outcomes of conversations contained in these chapters: surprise, intrigue, unknowns, novelty, fun, and fantasy. His zany ideas work. I witnessed four-hundred stodgy academes convinced into performing the wave and clamoring for the miniature rubber chickens and other devices Bonk tossed into the crowd. The bottom line: his strategies work even on the most critical and cynical because the "performance" breaks down barriers, makes the instructor more accessible, and creates an environment where delivering content is enjoyable. While rubber chickens are still a bit expensive to deliver to students (unless they own a 3D printer) the take away is that serious learning happens in fun environments.

All of the chapters impart fresh ideas, too numerous to mention here, but Chapters 12 and 13 must be acknowledged. In these chapters, the authors provide new and veteran instructors theoretical and practical advice on using challenge, dissonance, and controversy in bringing out critical thinking skills (Chapter 12). The two chapters are linked as Chapter 13 brings in the importance of goals, vision, and ownership-all components needed in any learning environment.

The fifteen chapters that comprise this book never sag or bore the reader. The resources offered alone make the price of the book a bargain-if you chose to by the soft cover or the Kindle version; explanation follows. One look at the index confirms how serious this work is. In the "K" section alone, of forty-four entries, forty of them list thought leaders in the online and hybrid learning domain. Yes, for you researchers in this field, Bonk and Khoo have created a readymade "go-to" bibliography.

Throughout this review, my overarching message has been that this book belongs in any faculty development arsenal as required reading. Upon reflection, this work actually belongs in the hands of all aspiring teachers or trainers; this is not all about androgogical strategies, this book brings great value to the K12 world as well. Currently, no other book exists that offers as much wisdom as Bonk and Khoo jam into three hundred and sixty seven pages. As many TV commercials often scream "and that's not all" this amazing piece of scholarship is free as an e-book at http://tec-variety.com/. Go ahead and do it. You'll never look back.