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[Book Review] Reconceptualising Learning in the Digital Age: The [Un]democratising Potential of MOOCs by A. Littlejohn and N. Hood (2018), Springer

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appear to operate largely on a behaviourist model, where rapid and continuous feedback prompts the learner to adapt and change. Learning paradigms that involve communities of practice, peripheral participation, collaboration and social interaction seem to be missing from the analysis. The focus of *Sage on the Screen* is more historical and descriptive than deeply theoretical.

I can imagine experiencing this book, with its interesting images, as a series of lectures. I learned a lot about technological innovations for educational media and how these developed through scientific experiment, playful tinkering and imaginative hypothesising. *Sage on the Screen* contains many details and anecdotes about famous and less well-known US educators, thinkers, engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and large and small businesses, from Thomas Edison to Microsoft. Minority communities and women are largely absent from this narrative arc. Two outliers in the overwhelmingly white male pantheon are Wendy Keeney-Kennicutt who developed *Second Life*-style immersive 3D environments for her university students' chemistry syllabus, and Salman Kahn whose eponymous Academy hosts millions of lessons on YouTube.

Readers looking for a global perspective are likely to find *Sage on the Screen* limited in scope. Aside from early mentions of Marconi, John Logie Baird and Donald F. MacLean, the book locates developments in American universities, start-ups, broadcast media, education systems, museums, and Hollywood. There are myriad culturally-specific references, such as Groucho Marx, Duke Ellington, Bill Gates, Woody Allen, P.T. Barnum, Edward R. Murrow, SATs, AP classes, and *Mr. Ed* (a 1961 TV sitcom about a talking horse). The fact that readers around the world are likely to be familiar with all or most of these shows the global influence of the USA on chronicles of technology and multimedia, and the embeddedness of cultural imperialism. There is a single instance in the book of a brief, failed experiment in educational media in American Samoa. Also, readers seeking history or background on educational media for learners with physical or cognitive needs will have to search elsewhere.

The USA has led the development of educational technologies and multimedia, but it is not the only player. For instance, *Sage on the Screen* provides a detailed description of the genesis of the children's television programme *Sesame Street* and its first US broadcast in 1969. Around the same time, in 1971, the UK Open University began television broadcasts of its courses, and from 1979 the OU provided computer-assisted learning systems such as home minicomputers, Cyclops, Prestel and teleconferencing.[1] Readers of *Sage on the Screen* will not learn about European Union-wide initiatives such as Raspberry Pi, or about the spread of MOOCs and mobile learning across India and Sub Saharan Africa.

There is something slightly outdated about the depiction of educational media as a 'sage on the screen', particularly in later chapters where media become more interactive and learner-led. Nowadays, learners of all ages independently access smaller and faster online and offline devices, outside of educational institutions. The 'sages' in

these contexts are less likely to be teachers, lecturers or authors. The sages are the devices holding the content, with device users directing their own learning in the digital multiverse. To paraphrase one of the educators in the book, content hasn't changed (much) but learners have. 'Instructional media' is increasingly unmediated by sages.

Sage on the Screen is an accessible book for anyone interested in the history of educational media and the debates about its effectiveness in the USA and, by implication, the rest of the world. *Sage on the Screen* is not for readers seeking an international picture or a critical evaluation, particularly with regard to global inequalities, or with regard to the impact of technologies on young children who are the fastest-growing target consumers of educational media. The book's accounts of people, businesses, media and technologies are, for the most part, unproblematic. In the final pages we learn, in a brief sentence, that educational media today is funded almost exclusively by venture capital firms. Nevertheless, there is much in *Sage on the Screen* that is stimulating and thought-provoking, as the parameters and possibilities of how and where we teach and learn continue to expand.

Review 2: Reconceptualising Learning in the Digital Age: The [Un] democratising Potential of MOOCs

Review authored by: Francisco Iniesto, The Open University, UK
Review of: Littlejohn, A and Hood, N. (2018) *Reconceptualising Learning in the Digital Age: The [Un] democratising Potential of MOOCs.* Singapore: Springer. 108 pages. ISBN: 978-981-10-8892-6, ISBN: 978-981-10-8893-3

This book by Littlejohn and Hood is part of the Springer Briefs in Open and Distance Education. It involves an analysis of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which have changed substantially since they first appeared, at the time claiming a change in open education to adopt a traditional approach to online learning. That is why this book aims to give visibility to the tensions derived from what at one point was claimed and the situation of what MOOCs involve today. This book reflects with a critical voice on MOOCs being a disruptive and democratising influence over Higher Education.

To discuss these tensions, the book is divided into six chapters. "The Many Guises of MOOCs" places the readers in context: MOOCs are widely spread among providers across platforms around the world reaching millions of participants. The dimensions of MOOCs are variable, as are their pedagogical approaches and business models, the latter being an important factor in the introduction of fees and payment courses MOOCs have an important characteristic of self-regulated and lifelong learning, along with origins linked to the Open Education movement, with all the potential that entails. This is why the authors are careful to take the reader through the history and background of the MOOCs, with the definitions of

Massive, Open, Online and Course describing in depth, the different pedagogical ideologies that coexist in MOOCs.

The remaining chapters focus on the book's objectives. "The [Un] Democratisation of Education and Learning" introduces the existing tension in MOOCs between their ability to increase the number of learners accessing educational opportunities and their ability to provide equal opportunities. To describe this, the authors introduce the processes of "Learnification of Education" and the importance of the use of language plays in research, policy and practice. In both cases, the tendency is to put the learner at the centre of the learning. The authors rightly point out that care must be taken to provide students with the appropriate tools since not all learners have the cognitive, behavioural or affective characteristics necessary, taking into account that MOOCs enhance an active participation environment.

Most MOOCs are designed for participants who already know how to study in an online environment, therefore learners who are less prepared to be autonomous are excluded. The claim that MOOCs democratise education is further in question given that MOOC providers belong to elite universities and multinationals. According to the authors, to ensure a more democratic way of learning, there must be a reconceptualization of how the goals of learning, outcomes and expected behaviour in MOOCs can be determined by the learners themselves. In addition, we must take into account the number of learners without Internet access, or the copyright policies and MOOC providers, taking into account the risk of a new neo-colonialism in developing nations with the use of courses based on Western Knowledge. All these are risks that the MOOCs are simply "new name, repeating model"

The chapters "The Emancipated Learner? The Tensions Facing Learners in Massive, Open, Learning "and" Massive Numbers, Diverse learning", repeat the existence of multiple names and concepts. The authors explore the perception of the individual in MOOCs as an active and autonomous learner. This autonomous perception can produce a conflict with the learners' own expectation in following accepted norms while participating in MOOCs. In this way, certain common standards accepted when participating in MOOCs may be isolating other learners MOOCs allow flexibility in learning, including increasing the number of MOOCs that are self-paced so that the learners decide to do it when they prefer instead of being limited by deadlines. This perspective enhances the predominant role that learners in MOOCs can self-regulate their own learning.

These chapters emphasise the meaning of learning in MOOCs by focusing on individual factors or the environment and behavioural norms. The authors present a novel typology of learners, based on the learners' motivations, these motivations and objectives change and therefore the more traditional approach that exists in MOOCs must be changed. This typology takes into account the qualitative narratives of the learners presenting them in the first person. This typology contains: "the invisible agent", "the socialiser", "the conventional learner" and "the cautious student" (p. 68–70). Therefore, human elements must be incorporated that imply the presence of a tutor or another peer with which to facilitate learning.

Chapter 5 "Designing for Quality?" focuses on quality in MOOCs. The authors wonder if traditional online learning quality measures are appropriate in MOOCs, exploring the difficulties of measuring quality. The authors consider several quality factors such as the platform provider, the instructor, the adaptability of context and the outcome. The inclusion of more data analytics is influencing how to interpret quality in these courses Data on engagement and interaction, however, must be interpreted bearing in mind the focus of MOOCs rather than a more traditional online learning.

Littlejohn and Hood's last chapter "A Crisis of identity? Contradictions and new Opportunities" as a summary of the book explores the criticism in MOOCs to become products that only have content and credentials for sale, instead of being a source of knowledge exchange and transforming the learners' experience. The authors focus on different problems to address, namely, the inconsistencies between what the MOOCs propose with what the learners finally get. These arguments reinforce the idea that MOOCs are for an elite. MOOCs were created with a disruptive objective in online education becoming another way of traditional online education. Instead, there is potential they can be used to promote professional learning. In that sense, authors disclose the potential for MOOCs to be used to enhance education, powered by governments and in international development with NGO's. To improve MOOCs, opportunities must be strengthened for all by promoting self-regulation. If the success measures are redefined, these not necessarily need to be linked to the economic benefit but as tasters to University Degrees or paid educational programs.

This book supposes a very necessary critical compilation of the role which MOOCs have been claimed to play and the one that finally they are playing in online education. Criticism, fortunately, goes further, promoting solutions for MOOCs as a useful tool to enhance the democratisation of learning. The focus of the book is global, although some voices are missing from those MOOC platforms that are not in English, and their role in MOOC development, MOOC evolution can be seen reflected by the dependence on the use of the English language. It is also missing the role accessibility, understood as for disabled learners, affects these educational environments. Positive factors involving the expansion of education that free platforms such as Open edX are playing. Initiatives at European level with EU funded projects evaluating quality in MOOCs. These projects include the quality measurement of MOOCs, providing benchmarks to facilitate the processes to improve it.

This book is a good reference for MOOC researchers, to develop critical and constructive thinking about this educational environment. This book provides awareness to educators and platform providers. It is easy and enjoyable reading for its plain and comprehensive language, making it highly recommended for those who want to know more

about MOOCs but are curious to know their less democratic and dark side.

Review 3: Adoption and Impact of OER in the Global South (C. Hodgkinson-Williams and P.B. Arinto)

Review authored by: Matthew Stranach, Thompson Rivers University, Canada
Review of: Hodgkinson-Williams, C and Arinto, P.B. (eds.) (2017) *Adoption and Impact of OER in the Global South*. Cape Town and Ottawa: International Development Research Centre & Research on Open Educational Resources. 606 pages. ISBN: 9781928331483

Adoption and Impact of OER in the Global South is a comprehensive, wide-ranging collection of case studies, analyses of regional policies, and other types of discussions relating to how open educational resources (OER) are used in 21 countries. These countries are part of the Research on Open Educational Resources for Development (ROER4D) initiative funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) as well as others. The collection is as much a summary and synthesis of the efforts of the various educators, students, and other stakeholders and participants involved in the ROER4D project as it is a collection of academic studies of OER development and use which would be valuable in and of themselves.

In the forward, UNESCO Chair in Open Education Tel Amiel rightly observes that that 'OER seems to be at the height of its hype cycle and the field is now ripe for critical review' (p.x). Scholars, teachers, instructional designers, and administrators (not necessarily just in higher education or in sectors involved in international development) interested in learning more about OER, educational practice using these (i.e., "open pedagogies"), and the myriad contextually-sensitive range of influences affecting OER would be well-advised to review this volume as much for the critical perspective on these issues as for the descriptive details and the lessons learned in each individual setting.

The volume is divided into five sections: Overview; South America; Sub-Saharan Africa; South and Southeast Asia; and Conclusion and Recommendations. Each of the sections is, in turn, divided into chapters. A notable absence in the volume arises from lack of participation by countries from the Middle East and North Africa due to 'political tensions' which precluded their involvement (p.12). Not mentioned, but also included in some definitions of the global south, are nations in the Caribbean and also Oceania.

The three chapters in Overview move from a general background on the ROER4D project, a very helpful meta-synthesis of themes emerging from the studies to follow, and a 'baseline survey' of OER use by higher education instructors in 28 institutions across 9 countries within the three regions represented in the project. Structural, cultural, and agential factors influencing the use of OER

in the ROE4D studies (p. 44) resonated inasmuch as I found myself thinking of these within the context of my own situation, i.e., as a learning technologist working in a Canadian institution of higher education. Simply put, the factors delineated and described, as well as the themes spoken to elsewhere in the Overview, felt familiar despite resulting from settings and contexts within a different milieu (and acknowledging my social and economic privilege being of the global north).

In Section 2, there are three chapters focused, respectively, on OER policy, co-creation of OER by teachers and students, and effectiveness of OER as related to student academic performance in specific South American contexts. Chapter 4, on OER policy in Latin America, speaks critically of inequality in regional access to higher education, as well as disparities in quality of resources, and provides examples of recent OER policy initiatives in three countries. Chapter 5 explores OER creation in one specific country (Columbia) through the lens of action research. Chapter 6 looks closely at the academic performance of a single group of students in a university math course. The of methodologies in these chapters, case study, action research, and mixed methods, are appropriate as per the settings and phenomena being studied. Needs identified in the chapters include the need for engagement with a broad cross-section of stakeholders to help create and promote greater awareness and support of open educational initiatives generally; the need for appropriate pedagogical support for OER initiatives; and highly contextually-sensitive nature of OER use as it relates to academic success.

Section 3, Sub-Saharan Africa, contains four chapters. These deal with a diverse range of topics including gaps in knowledge about how OER are financed; OER and pedagogy for and among teacher educators; factors affecting lecturer's use of OER; and OER in and as MOOCs. Chapter 4, entitled "Tracking the money for Open Educational Resources in South African basic education: What we don't know" makes an important contribution to the OER literature as much by the questions it raises as for its setting and the document review approach employed. Chapter 6 looks at educator knowledge and use of OER in 6 institutions across 3 countries in East Africa, using surveys and interviews. Chapter 9 addresses university lecturers' use of OER at 3 South African institutions through interviews. In Chapter 10: OER in and as MOOCs, the authors deal with the highly important question of how MOOC-making with OER influenced educators' use of Open Educational Practices (OEP). The approach for this chapter involved interviews and MOOC discussion postings from 4 courses at a single South African university. Having completed my doctoral work on how MOOCs are experienced by student participants, I found that this focus on MOOC educators as creators has helped address a major gap in the literature around these kinds of courses. Although the majority of the studies in Section 3 were based in South Africa, the contribution in speaking from Africa about OER is significant.

OER adoption and use in South and Southeast Asia is spoken to through five chapters in Section 4. Topics