FROM THE EDITOR

New Combinations for Higher Education

To produce means to combine materials and forces within our reach. To produce other things, or the same things by a different method, means to combine these materials and forces differently… Development [or innovation] in our sense is then defined by the carrying out of new combinations.
(Joseph A. Schumpeter, Theory of Economic Development, p. 65–66)

Many mainstream publications were generous in their coverage of massive open online courses (MOOCs) as the narrative rapidly unfolded throughout 2012. While reports focused on the myriad opinions of and prophecies about this new educational context, two characteristics in these pieces were often absent: the examination of data and the application of theoretical frameworks. What was missing from the discourse was an engagement with our existing frames of knowledge. This neglected aspect is significant because the innovation inherent within MOOCs is not that *new* knowledge is being employed; rather, it is that existing knowledge is being used in new combinations. The early 20th century economist, Joseph Schumpeter purported that innovation results from new combinations of knowledge, equipment, markets and resources. The innovation is in the combination.

This distinction regarding the innovative nature of MOOCs is important because it addresses the manner in which the articles in this issue engage the MOOC context. The authors herein examine the new context using existing frames of knowledge, these include: connectivism, item response theory, research into student success and persistence, theories of online learning, calibrated peer review, and the assessment of writing, to name a few. In doing so, we are invited on the one hand to consider the extent to which MOOCs may advance our educational frameworks and knowledge. Yet, on the other hand, as Stimpson aptly articulates in her review, we are reminded to be mindful of some who may "dismiss the past in order to legitimate the brave new world that will replace it."

The Summer 2013 issue of *RPA* opens with an overview penned by Cathy Sandeen of the *American Council on Education* who describes the organizational distinctions between the three major MOOC providers, macro social factors driving change, and the vital role of the assessment profession in this new model of education. In a study on learning, Breslow et al. offer some of the first published empirical data from a MOOC course. The authors examine course components and how student achievement and persistence can be conceptualized in the first MOOC course offered by edX. Meyer and Zhu introduce readers to item response theory, scale linking and score equating in order to discuss the evaluation of student learning in MOOCs that yield fair and equitable test scores. Stephen Balfour, a Director of Information Technology at Texas A&M, navigates readers through the intricacies of scaling the assessment of student writing assignments by contrasting two unique technologies: automated essay scoring (AES) and calibrated peer review (CPR).

In an insightful review, Catharine Stimpson, former President of the *Modern Language Association*, engages the recently released book by Salman Khan (of Khan's Academy) entitled, *The One World Schoolhouse*. A second review is presented in an admirable mentoring approach by a team of James Madison University graduate students and their professor who dialogue with Richard Shavelson and his work, *Measuring College Learning Responsibly*. Lastly, Katie Busby encourages assessment professionals to give serious consideration to the recent book authored by Keeling and Hersh, *We're Losing Our Minds*.

Finally, this issue ends with the Ruminate section as further consideration is given to Schumpeter's notion of new combinations in a provocative visual form. For many, I encourage you to begin the issue here, contemplating the photography of Huong Fralin and various excerpts on innovation. Art has a way of beckoning us to consider the circumstances of life through a new lens…which is the aim of this issue.

Regards,

Joshua Brown

Liberty University