

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **Online Learning: An Educational Development Perspective**

**Editor:** Fay Patel (Director - Education Management, Monash University Malaysia, Malaysia)

Fay Patel's edited *Online Learning: An Educational Development Perspective* (New York: Nova Publishers, 2014) is an impassioned and convincing argument for the integration of pedagogy with technology, and the partnering of educators, educational developers and instructional designers, to ensure optimal, innovative online learning for students. Drawing on existing research and their own experiences, Patel and her fellow contributors are positing that technology should not be considered a simple panacea for all that currently ails higher education. Rather, they emphasize instead that, used judiciously, with a discipline-based pedagogy and a context informed, holistic approach, educational technologies can support learning effectively.

With the focus on the range of learners and their differing needs, deep learning (including critical thinking), accessibility, and social responsibility can come to the fore. When online learning does not accomplish these goals they argue, we all, including senior administrators, have a responsibility to ourselves, our learners, our institutions, and our societies, to choose other forms of learning or, where possible, to change the online environment so that it can result in engaged learners and instructors. They note further that the western world must be ever more cognizant of the impact of our educational communication technologies on the international community and that while we might argue for the leveling of education through technology, developing communities still have not been able to achieve the quality of life such technologies promise.

Chapters five, six and seven explore creative, flexible and sustainable curriculum development, authentic assessment and enduring learning, resulting in a multi-perspective approach that does not alter whether the learning is face-to-face or online. Learning, they argue, needs to be grounded in real world contexts, ethical frameworks, and relevant communities in order to be transformative for the learner and thus impact our global societies. To accomplish this goal, curriculum development should not be constrained by "outcomes based, prescriptive, extrinsically driven accreditation requirements" but rather driven by an "open space, exploratory, integrated, flexible approach." (p.82) Ideally, Patel would have ensured that the online learning thread was clearer in these chapters by explicitly outlining how these approaches might manifest themselves in the online context. Nevertheless, this philosophical foundation for curriculum development is captivating and forces the reader to consider how they might accomplish such a goal in the context of their own online, discipline-based context or indeed in face-to-face learning.

As in many other aspects of higher education over the last decade, partnerships and teamwork are of paramount importance to the learning endeavor. Patel et al. present a unique perspective that this also needs to be the case for online learning. Ideally, in the future, there would not exist a divide or distinction between the roles of educational developers and instructional designers in their work with faculty creating online courses. Rather, all developers/designers would incorporate both pedagogical and technological knowledge into their practice, possibly supported by educational technicians. Both groups of professionals would converse and work together regularly with the discipline-content expert to form a complete and multi-faceted team that would discuss design and pedagogical issues, but also learning and teaching philosophies and perceptions of online learning. While the volume briefly mentions learners as partners in the

development process (in chapter 5 and chapter 8) a more in-depth consideration of the role students can play in fostering their own deep learning, critical thinking and social conscience would have been welcome. Too often in today's climate of learner as consumer or customer, students are too easily able to renege on their responsibility for their own learning. This on-going partnership during the course as well as during the design phase and post-course reflection could possibly include students. Doing so, would feed into the authors' argument that online learning experiences should enable learners to be change agents in their global communities.

*Online Learning* concludes with two chapters that focus the reader's attention on 'critical concerns' that need attention in the future consideration of online learning development. The first chapter focuses on "students with disabling conditions" and encourages educators to place a strong emphasis on considerations of inclusion in this context from both a technological and pedagogical perspective to the benefit of all students. The second chapter focuses on MOOCs and again on the role of educators and developers to take responsibility and ownership of the future of this new change in approach to higher education. In addition, they reflect on the new role of the 'library as faculty' and a re-visioned site of learning spaces in the proliferation of MOOCs. While, these concerns could have been embedded into the text more fully, this separate section highlights more readily the fact that in developing online courses teachers, designers and developers have not thought about these issues enough and must pay more attention to them. In this section, as is the case with the book overall, the authors leave us with a sense of our responsibility to ourselves and to our learners to create online learning environments that will ensure the development of the kinds of citizens and human beings that will foster an enhanced future for us all.

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