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Abstract

E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Framework for Research and Practice, 2003. D.R. Garrison and Terry Anderson. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer. 161 pages. ISBN 0-415-26346-8

Review by Dirk Morrison

I will be the first to admit that I have, of late, grown just a little weary of the rhetorical din associated with e-everything. From the constant barrage of mass media hipsters selling their e-wares, to the virtual ivory e-towers of academia, the buzz is that anything available or experienced "online" is somehow inherently superior, or is at least cutting an edge somehow, somewhere. My trouble with all this is that, more often than not, I am disappointed by the feeble and unconvincing ideas and arguments brought forth to support the e-enthusiasts' claims and assertions. Reading *E-Learning in the 21st Century* was, happily, a welcome antidote to my growing cynicism regarding the "hoopla over substance" problem so characteristic of discussions focused on technology in higher education. The key difference, and in my view the primary contribution, of this book is captured by the rest of the title: "A Framework for Research and Practice." With this emphasis, the authors offer and deliver to the reader an essential core of theoretical yet practicable ideas and principles so often missing from other treatises on this topic.

E-Learning in the 21st Century is logically ordered and organized to present two halves of a holistic perspective. Part I lays out the conceptual framework, the critical theoretical core, across six chapters, four of which explicate the details of the Community of Inquiry Model. In a nutshell, the model, informed by principles of constructivism and philosophical perspectives of Dewey, clearly and elegantly conveys the message that truly effective online learning environments will necessarily include aspects of cognitive, social, and teaching "presence." Each of these key components, is, in turn, duly expanded upon in separate chapters to give the detail needed for a thorough understanding not only of the model but also the implications of such for practice. My only criticism of this section is that chapter four, which focuses on the technology of learning, seems misplaced amongst the chapters presenting an overview of the model and its details.

Part II of the book spends the next four chapters discussing how one might apply the conceptual framework presented to the practical realities and challenges facing those charged with developing and delivering quality online learning environments. The authors wisely first present to the reader a set of guidelines for practice, to

included sections on learning activities, design considerations, and facilitating online discourse; most of these discussions are tied back to the components of the Community of Inquiry Model. The authors devote the next two chapters to a focus on assessment and evaluation, and organizational issues. In my view, these emphases are essential to any meaningful discussion of the considerations necessary to implementing a robust and sustainable e-learning agenda.

The final chapter, Future Directions, is perhaps somewhat obligatory in books of this sort and contributes most not by pointing out the obvious regarding developments on the Net, namely that volume, variety, and value-addition of information will continue to increase but rather by tying these to the changing needs and demands of e-learners. The addition of Appendix B (Methodological Issues in the Content Analysis of Computer Conference Transcripts) may perplex some readers as irrelevant, but any wishing to pursue investigations focused on analyses of online learning will find this useful.

While one could pine for a thicker volume, one in which the authors expand and elaborate on the many significant ideas presented here, this is not their purpose. This book concisely presents a solid theoretical framework upon which to ground one's research and practice in the arena of online learning. So, whether scholar, practitioner, or a little of both, *E-Learning in the 21st Century* would make a worthwhile addition to your library.

Reviewer

E-effective Writing for E-learning Environments, 2004. K. Campbell. Hershey, Pennsylvania: Information Science Publishing. 582 pages. ISBN: 1-59140-124-0

Reviewed by Heather M. Ross

While *E-effective Writing for E-Learning Environments* by Katy Campbell is written specifically for writers of e-learning materials, it is an important reference for anyone who works creating new learning resources. It is a manual for the experienced as well as the novice. Professional instructional designers and academics are already familiar with Dr. Campbell, who has long been a leader in Canadian instructional design circles, and a regular contributor to the *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology* and other leading journals in our field.

This is really two books in one: a text and a workbook. I recommend at least skimming over the workbook before reading the corresponding chapter in the text. This will provide you with a guide for what you will be reading and will plant some questions in your head which you may find answers to within the chapter.

Each chapter contains key terms and ideas, as well as an extensive list of references and resources. Icons along the side of the text denote citations of relevant information and point out corresponding sections in the workbook. Throughout the book, Campbell gives you questions to ponder whether this is your first attempt at designing materials or an entire course, or you are experienced and simply looking to improve the way you currently do things.

The workbook includes space for you to fill in the goals and questions that you may have, and a place to note the answers you may find through the reading or through outside research for your particular project. These charts are a wonderful way of helping you to focus on the questions that must be answered for your material. I would recommend, however, that you recreate these charts outside of the book for each of your projects. This will allow you to use them over and over again in the future. At the end of each chapter in the handbook there is a space for your "To Do" list. These are the things that you still need to do for your project related to what has just been covered in the corresponding chapter.

With this book, Campbell takes you from deciding whether e-learning is right for your particular situation all the way through to usability testing. She allows you to take a hands-on, personal approach to the material, providing outside assignments to get you thinking about various elements of I.D. For example, in Chapter Two she sends you to your favorite website to find "three design features that you really like or find powerful." She then has you show that same website to three other people you know to find out what they think of it and if it meets the needs of their learning styles.

Campbell emphasizes the benefits of user-centered design and the importance of performing a needs assessment prior to starting to create any materials. She reminds us that as instructional designers we must look at not only differences in learning styles, but also in geography, language, gender, age, physical abilities, and culture. "The effective e-writer recognizes that a learning community may include a wide variety of individuals, with diverse needs and expectations. The notion of culture provides one way to address this diversity." (Campbell, p. 59)

Colour is just one aspect of design that must be considered when addressing issues of culture and Campbell helps by including a chart displaying how certain colours may be interpreted in various regions of the world. She goes on to offer questions to ponder on issues of access based on physical abilities as well as technological limitations. What do you do if your end-users cannot see twelve point text because of vision limitations or they do not have access to computers that can handle the multi-media aspects of your materials? These are important things to consider and Campbell does a great job of getting you thinking about these issues and pointing you in the right direction when you need additional information to address these concerns.

After you have determined if e-learning is right for your purpose and you have done your needs assessment, Campbell takes you through how to turn your material into an appropriate format for e-learning. For this, she discusses how readers read material that is in an electronic format and how this will impact the way you design your project. She then takes you through the differences between presenting your material in a linear fashion and using hyperlinks. She presents this information in a way that you do not have to be familiar with how to use hypertext markup language to understand what she is saying. You can easily take Campbell's suggestions, write the content, design how the material should be presented, and have somebody else complete the more technical aspects of the project.

Ellen Whybrow contributes Chapter Four to the book, "Selecting and Evaluating Learning Objects." You do not have to create all new materials for your project. There are lots of good websites with resources you could apply. Whybrow does an impressive job of explaining how to find and utilize these materials.

In Chapter Six, Campbell discusses other types of e-text besides print: still images, audio, video/animation, and slide shows. Her "personal guideline" on presenting material is an excellent one to follow: "I try to present information in at least two forms, whether I'm teaching in a face-to-face classroom or designing a course for

the Web. Although not always possible, or appropriate, this guideline always reminds me that I am writing or designing for individuals with needs or challenges that may be different from my own or from those of others." (Campbell, p. 179)

Chapter Seven is filled with excellent advice on structuring the learning environment. When and where your students will learn the material is a vital consideration when designing. Chapter Eight provides insight on how people read and view images. These are also key points to take into account when designing your material.

Chapter Nine is a crash course in the basics of usability testing. Before you use your material with your target audience you should test it on users with similar characteristics as your end-users and make necessary changes. With this chapter, Campbell addresses who to test, what to test, who should carry out the test, and what to do with the test results.

Again, this book was written for those involved in or interested in e-learning, but I consider it a valuable resource for anyone designing, or thinking about designing instructional materials or even just considering having somebody else put an existing course online. Add this one to your professional library.

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