
Book Reviews

The Computer Clubhouse: constructionism and creativity in youth communities

YASMIN B. KAFAI, KYLIE A. PEPPLER & ROBBIN N. CHAPMAN (Eds), 2009
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In our rapidly expanding digital world, it often seems as if we gain access to some form of new technology on a monthly basis (at the very least). Within the field of education, many have embraced these new technologies, and brave teachers and administrators have attempted to incorporate computers and the Internet into everyday classroom life. Unfortunately, as Mitchel Resnick, an MIT professor and a co-founder of the Computer Clubhouse, notes, access to the latest and greatest in digital technologies will not guarantee a learning revolution. For this revolution to occur, we need to completely shift our thinking about learning and teaching, 'and our ideas of how new technologies can support them' (Resnick, 2002, p. 32). Giving students access to new technologies is not enough; true learning will not take place if we only regard computers (and learning, for that matter) as 'information-transmitters'. But how might we begin to spark a learning revolution in American schools in this digital age?

Fortunately, there already exists an excellent and unique model of how to incorporate computers in a learning environment so that young people are able to become digitally fluent consumers *and* producers of technology. It is called the Computer Clubhouse, and it is the subject of a new book titled *The Computer Clubhouse: Constructionism and Creativity in Youth Communities* (2009), from editors Yasmin B. Kafai, Kylie A. Peppler & Robin N. Chapman. The book presents the reader with not only an overview of the theory and practice of the Clubhouse model, but also with the editors' and authors' detailed research into and evaluations of the creative work produced by Clubhouse members, as well as a description of the impact of the activities that occur inside a typical Clubhouse. The editors of this volume have set forth two main purposes for their work: (1) to assemble a collection of writings that detail and evaluate the creative projects, authentic learning, and support network that distinguish the Clubhouse model; and (2) to impart wisdom gained from this special learning model, with the hope that it will inspire and encourage others in the field to re-imagine after-school and in-school learning environments.

Divided into four thematic sections and comprising a total of twelve chapters, this volume is logically organized from the very beginning. Part I, titled 'The Computer Clubhouse Model', begins with an introductory chapter written by co-founders of the first ever Computer Clubhouse: Natalie Rusk, Mitchel Resnick & Stina Cooke. They relate the humorous origins of the first Clubhouse (a group of children sneaking into Boston's Computer Museum, in the hopes of continuing their experimentation with a LEGO robotics and computer programming exhibit!), and go on to discuss the theory and principles that became the guiding foundation for future Clubhouses. The Clubhouse learning method is based largely on the educational philosophy known as *constructionism*, developed by MIT professor Seymour Papert, which purports that 'people don't get ideas; they make them' (Rusk et al, 2009, Chap. 1, p. 19). The authors describe clearly the merits of the constructionist approach to learning and how it provided a blueprint for the Computer Clubhouse's four guiding principles. In brief, these essential and foundational principles of the Computer Clubhouse are: (1) authentic learning will be supported by and through design experiences; (2) Clubhouses will aid members in developing their own unique interests, and members will be encouraged to make their own choices; (3) a Clubhouse and its mentors and supervisors will strive to create an emerging community of learners; and (4) Clubhouses will be

environments built on respect and trust, so that members will feel safe to explore, learn, and create in such environments.

Part I of the book also includes a chapter detailing the Clubhouse Network, which connects Clubhouse members to their counterparts in international Clubhouse locales and allows them to share, via an intranet called the 'Village', common interests, and to collaborate on creative projects. The remainder of Part I presents readers with the editors' summation of interviews with the community organizers, network staff, and Clubhouse organizers from various Clubhouse sites around the world. These interviews shed light on what makes the Clubhouse model work and how their roles and the setup of the model as a whole create a support system for the Clubhouse to flourish and grow, as described by the people who are at the heart of its operation. All in all, the first part of the book ably answers every question a reader who is unfamiliar with the ideas and structure of the Computer Clubhouse might have about what it actually is. For questions about the kind of activities that take place within the walls of a Clubhouse, we turn to the second thematic section of the book.

Part II of *The Computer Clubhouse* delves into the software and activities that were designed expressly *for*, or in some cases *by*, Clubhouse members. Authors Kylie Pepler & Yasmin Kafai discuss Scratch, a computer programming language created for Clubhouse users, which allows young people to create their own interactive media projects, all the while introducing them to media mixing and programming. Amon Millner presents his analysis of 'hook-ups', which are physical objects (usually recycled or craft materials) that kids located in Clubhouses in Boston have programmed to interface with computer software, or to control games or animations, among other computer programs. Finally, Kylie Pepler & Yasmin Kafai document a unique Clubhouse activity in the Los Angeles community, in which youth of various ages used videography and computers to film, edit, and produce footage of a new and original dance style called Krump. This activity highlights both the leadership and the initiative of many members of this particular Clubhouse. This second part of the text is highly engaging, and full of rich anecdotal evidence and actual documentation of Clubhouse happenings. For anyone invested in the education of today's youth, it is absolutely thrilling to read about young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and who eagerly 'take the reins' of their own learning experiences to produce amazing media projects with cutting-edge technologies.

In the third section of the book, the authors expand our understanding of the Clubhouse community itself, and discuss how three distinct forms of collaboration affect the members' learning experiences. Robbin Chapman discusses 'social knowledge sharing software called Pearls of Wisdom', which she designed so that Clubhouse members could reflect upon and share their design experiences with other members through tangible reflection vehicles dubbed 'Pearls' (p. 81). She presents patterns of members' participation in 'Pearls' reflections and examines how this critical reflection fosters deeper learning among both members and mentors. The second chapter in this section focuses on this member-mentor relationship. The authors put forth the idea that in the Computer Clubhouse model, mentoring takes the form of a unique 'mentoring partnership', as the interactions of mentors and members can range a great deal. Interestingly, Clubhouse mentors more often serve as facilitators and co-constructors of knowledge and skills than as teachers per se, and many times are learning right alongside their mentees. Author Elisabeth Sylvan tackles a tough but important question in the section's final chapter: how do members in Clubhouses influence each other's learning and creativity through their various interactions, both face to face and online? Sylvan concentrates her discussion on the Village, the private intranet for Clubhouse members, and describes how members participate by sharing and showcasing their work for other members in Clubhouses located across the country or globe. Again, this section is well organized, and it is apparent to readers that its scope and theme are carefully planned. I was fascinated by the discussion of the various collaborations that occur in Clubhouses. And for other educators like myself, the idea of software created expressly to foster students' critical thinking and reflection just might make them giddy with anticipation for such a tool in one's own classroom!

Since the inception of the first Computer Clubhouse in the 1990s, directors and researchers have sought to understand its impact on its young members, and its application to their 'real-world' lives. The final section of the book expands upon this theme, covering a variety of outcomes from Clubhouse participation. Gail Breslow discusses different forms of assessment in Clubhouses, and how directors and facilitators can use such data to shift the way the Clubhouses might change or

expand in coming years. Brenda Abanavas and Robbin Chapman shed light on a recent development at several Clubhouse sites, called 'Hear Our Voices', which was a campaign to involve more young women in Clubhouse activities. The lessons learned from their campaign and data may be very informative for schools nationwide, hoping to spark girls' interest in science, math, and technology education. The final chapter examines programming within a particular Clubhouse environment, and the authors share observations of programming-like activities and trace the evolution of its use in this Clubhouse. The volume's editors provide an excellent conclusion within the epilogue, touching on both the Clubhouse learning model and the future of the Computer Clubhouses themselves.

This book, as a whole, is an excellent introduction for readers (like myself) who were previously unaware of what exactly the Computer Clubhouse is, and the impact it has had on its young members worldwide. Barton J. Hirsch, who authored the text's foreword, hits the nail on the head with his opening statement: 'The Computer Clubhouse – and this book – are not just for techies, or at least not techies as we have traditionally thought of them' (p. ix). Perhaps the greatest praise I can give to the editors and authors of this volume is that reading it cover to cover made me want to visit a Clubhouse, and become an 'honorary member' for a day. I was completely impressed with this book and its many exemplary qualities, not least among them that it was highly informative and logically organized. Furthermore, although this edited volume has over fifteen authors and twelve chapters, there was a definite fluidity to the book with its smooth transitioning between chapters, which so many other edited volumes seem to lack. The use of data-backed evidence, fieldwork observations, and tables and graphs served to further enhance my understanding of the inner workings of the Computer Clubhouses, but did not at all make the reading overly dense so that it became a chore to pick up the book. I absolutely loved the fact that the voices that are really at the core of any Clubhouse, the voices of its many young members (and mentors and coordinators as well), were skillfully interwoven throughout the majority of the book. Reading direct quotes from members who have experienced the power of the Clubhouse learning model drives home the impact of such a place in the lives of urban, minority, or disadvantaged young people worldwide.

I have few, if any, criticisms of this well-put-together volume. However, I was left wondering about some lingering questions that, if answered, would have enhanced my overall understanding of the Computer Clubhouse. First, as I read about the private intranet within the Computer Clubhouse Network, called the Village (which has many social networking components), I was intrigued by the following statement: 'The Village ... was started way before social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook became popular...' (p. 15). No further context was given about the timeline of when the Village was developed compared with when these other social networking sites were developed. For the record, according to social networking researcher danah boyd, MySpace launched in 2003, while Facebook came into being the following year (boyd, 2007). The Computer Clubhouse's Village did indeed launch well before these social networking giants, back in 1998, according to a visual timeline found on the Computer Clubhouse website (Intel Computer Clubhouse Network, n.d.). This is a minor addition that could be included in a second, revised edition of the volume, but lack of mention of time scales did leave me 'hanging' as the reader. The lack of information about Clubhouses in more international locales prompted the second question that continually entered my mind as I read. Aside from the discussion of the world-travelling puppet Cosmo in Patricia Díaz' chapter, most of the fieldwork observations and data presented were from Clubhouses in the United States. While there may have been a logistical reason for this, I did find myself wondering whether members of a Clubhouse located in, for instance, Palestine or Colombia are engaged in the same kinds of design activities and collaborations as members in the American Clubhouses featured in this volume.

Finally, as I came at this book with an educator's perspective, I became quite excited by the prospect of the constructionist vision and learning model expounded by the Clubhouse entering schools and classrooms. My final wish for this volume is that it included some discussion of whether the learning model of the Computer Clubhouse (which clearly 'works', in terms of keeping young people motivated and interested in forging their own learning experiences) has been applied to other after-school programs or even within schools themselves. If others have tried to implement the Clubhouse model, have they been successful? How has the constructionist and creative approach to learning been redesigned for use in the classroom? And if no ambitious

administrator or educator has attempted this yet, then this begs the practical question of how we might go about gradually fitting components of the Clubhouse learning model into classroom and school life. Such questions are left to the reader's own reflection and imagination, but I might go so far as to suggest it as a topic for inclusion in the editors' or authors' follow-up volume!

In all, *The Computer Clubhouse* provides the reader with a wonderful introduction to what the Clubhouse is, why the learning model works so well, and the outcomes and impact Clubhouses have had on many young people's lives. This book will appeal not only to educational researchers and techies alike, but also to coordinators of after-school programs and educators both in and out of the classroom, as there are many lessons to be taken from the Clubhouse's constructionist, creative approach to learning.

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Teaching the New Writing: technology, change, and assessment in the 21st century

ANNE HERRINGTON, KEVIN HODGSON & CHARLES MORAN (Eds), 2009
New York: Teachers College Press
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Despite a plethora of books on the market that address issues of technology integration into educational settings, and into literacy instruction in particular, it remains a challenge to find 'just the right' book that can be used to help teachers explore the possibilities of integrating the new literacies into writing instruction. Lankshear & Knobel (2007) define new literacies in two ways. First, new literacies involve using digital technologies in order to do new things or do old things in new ways. Second, and perhaps most importantly, new literacies lead us to new ways of thinking or understanding the world. This new 'ethos', according to Lankshear & Knobel, is tightly bound to issues of participation in wide-ranging literacy practices, collaboration, and the distribution of knowledge across formal and informal realms of interaction. Rare is the practitioner-oriented book that is clearly grounded in an understanding of what constitutes these new literacies and what the implications of those new literacies are for learners.

In my search for texts to share with preservice, novice, and even veteran teachers, I have found that practitioner-gearred texts generally focus on the how-to of using specific digital tools (such as blogs, wikis, webquests, presentation software, or audio and video tools) to technologize existing pen-and-paper assignments. While these books are somewhat useful, I find that existing practice and ways of thinking about learning and education are left unchallenged. Because technology-focused books often lack a theoretical grounding in the new literacies, the reader is set up for a cookbook style of instruction without understanding why particular technologies are used for particular learning situations. As such, teachers often end up taking what they already do and simply adding on a layer of technology. An additional but more prosaic risk of such texts is that

they are often passé by the time they are available in the bookstores. How irritating it is to find a resource described in a book, only to discover it is no longer available or the URL no longer works.

There are a large number of theoretically sound texts available that explore the new literacies by presenting exciting descriptions of youth practices, but I have found that these books often frustrate teachers and other educators because what is described often takes place outside school in after-school programs, or is a unique program that is difficult to translate into everyday practice. The teachers I work with (novice teachers in particular) say they *want* to use the new literacies as part of their instruction in order to develop the new ways of thinking engendered by the new literacies, but repeatedly I hear them worry that the new literacies are not appropriate or applicable to school settings or to their school setting in particular. They struggle to make the connections between the everyday pressures of the classroom and the somewhat amorphous and unpredictable nature of new literacies.

Happily, *Teaching the New Writing: Technology, Change, and Assessment in the 21st Century*, edited by Anne Herrington, Kevin Hodgson & Charles Moran, generally avoids the pitfalls I have just identified. For the most part, I find it to be 'just the right' book about how to use new literacies to support writing development. In this volume, Herrington, Hodgson & Moran have compiled an impressive set of chapters from a wide range of authors. The authors include elementary and secondary-level teachers, graduate students, college professors, and members of the National Writing Project. The different authors teach in a variety of socioeconomic contexts and geographic locations within the United States, thus addressing a wide range of teaching and learning contexts across the book. As such, readers are likely to find chapters that resonate directly with their own teaching situation. The book is divided into three sections, each focused on a different developmental level (primary–middle school; high school; early college), which may entice readers to selectively read only those chapters that speak to their grade level. However, I urge readers to read all the chapters because each one offers insights into the ways of thinking developed by new literacies as well as concrete ideas that can be carried into a variety of teaching contexts regardless of the age of the students.

Although each contribution to the volume is written from a practitioner's perspective, the editors have taken care to frame the book theoretically. This is essential in that, as the editors note in the preface, their intent is for teachers to 'reflect on their own conceptions of writing and related teaching practice' (p. ix) and on 'the relations between multimodal and alphabetic writing and the nexus between classroom practice and state curriculum frameworks and assessments' (p. ix). Thus, each contribution to the volume is more than an explanation of how each teacher integrated the digital tools into writing instruction. Each chapter considers how the authors *thought* about and understood the relationship of technology to writing. The clear focus of each chapter supports teachers in understanding how what they do in the classroom and how they design their curriculum and supporting assignments is part of a larger system and larger perspective on literacy, and writing in particular.

The theoretical base of the book is established in chapter one: 'Challenges for Writing Teachers: Evolving Technologies and Standardized Assessment'. In this chapter, Herrington & Moran draw on the work of scholars in the field of the New Literacy Studies and new literacies to argue that 'new venues for writing, including e-mail, texting, and blogging, ask for new composing skills and mindsets' (p. 1). They suggest that the advent of digital technologies has brought about a marked shift in the world of writing, in that new forms of composition are being opened up even as the technologization of instructional delivery methods and assessment is pulling us back into the realm of the five-paragraph essay. Thus, writing instruction in the twenty-first century must negotiate the tension between the new ethos of literacies and traditional models of writing supported by the top-down mandates of the standards and accountability movement.

In chapter one, the tensions in writing instruction are explored through a brief historical review of how the emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web moved us from seeing writing as an individualistic act to seeing it as an interconnected social act, and how it moved writing from the typographic to the multimodal. Drawing on the work of Kress (2003), Herrington & Moran claim that student writers should not be limited to learning how to produce linear typographic texts, but instead now must be designers of interconnected, hyperlinked compositions that include sound, graphics, and video, as well as typography. They then connect these theoretical issues with the very real issues facing teachers on a daily basis – those of assessment and the

privileging of traditional writing rather than understanding writing technologies as ways to communicate ideas. From the perspective of teachers, it is particularly important that Herrington & Moran acknowledge the realities of high-stakes testing and how those tests figure writing and writing assessment. The authors end by suggesting that the contributors to this volume can help us

understand how teachers and their students can negotiate between two apparently distinct worlds, the world of standardized writing assessments that privilege linear, essayist literacy, and the world of contemporary society where the ability to compose nonlinear, multimodal, and sometimes interactive texts is becoming increasingly valued. (p. 14)

Ultimately, they suggest, it is the responsibility of the teacher to help students develop as thinkers and problem solvers, and technology, they claim, is a tool that can help build those skills.

With the above framework in mind, the subsequent chapters contribute concrete examples of how different uses of the new literacies have been taken up in various classrooms to support students as thinkers and problem solvers. Each chapter contains the rationale for the project and explanations of the process, and is rich with examples of student work. The contributors are also honest about what did not work and what changes they are considering for future iterations. In addition, the chapters address the issue of standards and assessment and clarify how the projects are consistent with the standards required by the specific teaching context. Most importantly, however, the authors are clear about the type of thinking the students are engaged in as they develop as new kinds of writers.

The first section of this volume focuses on elementary- and middle-school-aged students. Marva Solomon describes how a group of second-grade students in a summer program for struggling readers and writers created websites as a way to develop their skills in writing. After carefully describing the project and how she assessed the students' development as writers, she suggests that multimodal authoring challenges traditional notions of the writer's workshop by making it technically unpredictable, noisy and at times chaotic as the students spontaneously share their writing with one another. Whereas Solomon's experience involved a summer program and a small group of children, Glen L. Bledsoe explains the process he and all his fourth-grade students followed as they engaged in collaborative digital writing. Collaborative digital writing, according to Bledsoe, involves teacher modeling of the technical aspects of computer use as well as of the craft of writing, and coaching in the writing process. The end product can result in podcasts, videos, or digital stories. Through a description of the process, the role of the teacher, and the assessment and evaluation process, Bledsoe provides the reader with a clear vision of how collaborative digital writing could be used to support student writing as well as interpersonal and organizational skills. The final chapter in this section describes how Kevin Hodgson's sixth-grade students created science-focused digital picture books, which they shared with second and third graders. Although Hodgson provides a clear explanation of the process and examples of student work, his chapter is most notable for its discussion of assessment, evaluation, and standards. He found that his students discovered that passive presentations were less effective than when they allowed their audience to interact with the digital story, and that his students spontaneously revised their work during the sharing process. He argues that his students learned not only how to use software and think like a designer but also how to self-assess and listen to the needs of their audience.

The middle section of the book focuses on secondary-level writing instruction and includes a chapter on blogging in a high school journalism course, the integration of video, spoken, and audio material in poetry projects, the use of multimodal texts for senior-level culminating projects, and the multimodal composing process in a speech class. Paul Allison's chapter details how blogging is a 'multitasked, intricate process of reading, writing, talking, creating media, and doing research' (p. 90) that requires students to develop their skills in manipulating multimedia including but not limited to text, images, and audio. Allison argues that through this experience students become researchers and writers as they learn how to get their voice heard in a noisy online environment and use social media for social action. The chapter following this describes Jeffrey Schwartz's work with girls in a private school who created video and audio texts to express their understandings of self-selected poems. Schwartz includes a discussion about his assessment process as well as the rubric he uses, which is helpful to any teacher considering a similar project. While Schwartz's work involved literary analysis and expression, Bryan Ripley Crandall's focus is on using multimedia composing to present the results of several year-long research and community-based projects

conducted by seniors. Like the other authors, he includes a discussion of assessment, but the most powerful section of his chapter is his exploration of how his curriculum and teaching changed as a result of integrating technology into his instruction. He writes that he has learned to be comfortable with 'technological digression' (p. 120) and has discovered that these seeming digressions actually contribute to his instructional goals. The final chapter in this section is by Dawn Reed & Troy Hicks, who share their experience of guiding students through multimodal composing in a high school speech class. In this class, the students wrote speeches, which they then delivered via a podcast made available online. Reed & Hicks argue that through this project the students 'joined a conversation as members of a global society, moving their voices from the front of the classroom to the ears of the world' (p. 138).

Each of these four chapters provides insights into the processes the teachers followed in designing the assignments and developing the required assessments. Examples from student work show what is possible, and the authors are honest about what did not work. What is disappointing, however, is that all the projects in this section take place within specialized courses or in unique contexts. I fear that teachers may be resistant to using the ideas put forth by the authors because the work required does not easily fit into the curriculum of a core high school course. Nonetheless, I hope that teachers will be open to the possibilities and take what is useful about how the new literacies support new ways of thinking, rather than allowing themselves to feel bound by the teaching contexts described by each author.

The final third of the book, entitled 'Bridging to the College Years', contains three chapters that look at multimodal writing in college settings and a final commentary by the editors. Mya Poe & Julianne Rodkowski Opperman describe and compare two different contexts in which high school seniors in a college preparatory program and college freshmen at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are engaged in what they consider to be a new approach to scientific writing. Both sets of students use PowerPoint to create storyboards of their science inquiry projects and use peer review to assess their work, as well as teacher-created rubrics to evaluate the final products. Although the use of technology in this case is not particularly innovative, the authors argue that the multimodal and collaborative nature of the assignment brings science and writing closer together and helps students think like scientists. Most significantly, they argue that the project has led them to rethink how they teach writing, even though their definition of scientific writing remains unchanged.

In chapter ten, Peter Kittle describes his experience teaching an advanced composition course designed for pre-service teachers. He explores how his students' creation of multimodal projects opened up new ways for them to engage with course content. Kittle uses data drawn from four case students to reveal how student thinking evolved during the course, and he comes to the conclusion that the collaborative nature of the multimodal projects contributed to decentering knowledge and to the development of a critical stance, a mediating schema that 'helped them attend to salient parts of the text' (pp. 177-178), and the formation of an identity as a composer, director, or writer.

The final practitioner contribution to the volume is by Alanna Frost, Julia A. Myatt & Stephen Smith. In their chapter, they explain how they integrated three different multimodal writing projects in college writing classes. Frost's and Myatt's teaching included a multimodal profile essay and a hybrid essay that included both words and images. Smith then provides additional insight by describing how his efforts to integrate a multimodal assignment into his class failed to meet its potential. The strength of this chapter is the set of questions the authors developed in response to student questions about what a multimodal text is expected to contain. For example, when asked, 'Do our pictures need captions?' the authors suggest the response of 'Will your audience expect captions?' (p. 191). Rather than providing checklists and rubrics for students to follow blindly, such questions guide students to think like designers as they consider the needs of their audience and the purposes of their texts.

Despite the many insights and ideas offered by the various authors in this edited volume, teachers who have fewer resources than those described may be discouraged. Although most schools in the United States and other similar countries are equipped with Internet-connected computers, the actual access to fast, up-to-date and accessible computers may be lower than the penetration numbers imply. These barriers to access will make it difficult to carry out the projects

described by the authors. However, teachers can take what the authors have learned and adapt it to the realities of their specific situations.

One of the greatest strengths of this volume is the care with which issues of assessment, evaluation, and standards are addressed. Those teachers who resist the integration of the new literacies and technology into the classroom because of fears relating to assessment and standards will be reassured by the many discussions and examples of assessments provided by the authors. Each chapter demonstrates that multimodal writing/designing/composing can be assessed and evaluated in ways consistent with mandated standards, and that it can be done in ways that support the development of the type of thinking needed within the twenty-first century.

In the final summary chapter, the editors remind us that the emergence of a new technology does not render an older technology obsolete. Rather, technologies overlap, combine, and coexist (p. 200). Furthermore, past practices and technologies form the foundation for the new. According to Herrington, Hodgson & Moran, the old ways of writing, teaching writing, and assessing writing are evolving in response to the advent of new digital tools. The most powerful message of the book, however, is actually found in the early pages. Solomon writes, 'Today's kids are digital kids with digital lives bombarded with digital messages. If I don't learn to incorporate the digital into my classroom, I am also in danger of presenting a curriculum that is incomplete' (p. 37). Practitioners who carefully consider the instructional models provided by the authors in this volume and the firm theoretical grounding established by the editors will be one step closer to creating writing curricula that meet the needs of students in the twenty-first century.

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Making the Move to eLearning: putting your course online

KAY LEHMANN & LISA CHAMBERLIN, 2009

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

268 pages, ISBN 978 1 60709 041 0

The authors of *Making the Move to eLearning: putting your course online* state their viewpoint about online learning in the first sentence and don't look back: 'Online education, also known as *eLearning* or *distance education*, can be an exceptional mode of learning when facilitated well' (p. 1). In the next couple of hundred pages, the authors offer hints and practices to produce effective online courses. In fifteen short chapters, the reader learns about the history of online learning, educational theories to apply when developing classes, and techniques for assessing student work (primarily based around online discussions, group projects, and occasional quizzes) and managing students new to the online environment.

This book offers excellent preparation and advice for instructors accepting or beginning a role as an online instructor, but does not offer a critical look at online learning or systematically analyze its advantages and disadvantages. Professors, administrators, or trainers looking to weigh the options about whether or not to proceed with online learning will be able to consider the specific details and examples to help formulate their decision, but overt debate is avoided. Rather, the text offers a practical overview of what is required of an online instructor and how to be successful if one has chosen that path.

In the first chapter, entitled 'The Radical Truth', the 'truth' in the chapter title refers to the authors' belief in the value of online learning. They offer 26 facts about the nature of online learning, primarily focusing on positive features; for example, 'Online learning contributes to

sustainability; it is a green industry' or '[s]tudents can learn from the best instructors in the world no matter where the instructor lives. For that matter, students can attend the best schools in the world, no matter where the students live' (p. 4). Whether or not this is actually true – most highly ranked universities in the United States don't offer online degrees – is not debated. While many of the individual items on the list are valid statements, this introductory chapter's lack of critical consideration leaves the reader questioning why the opposing side is missing. No attempt is made to explain away criticism of online education; it's simply ignored. Nonetheless, as the complexities of online learning are explored in subsequent chapters, the book's objectives come into focus.

The second chapter, 'The Past, Present, and Future Development of Online Learning', offers a concise summary of distance learning, beginning with correspondence courses and continuing with computer-aided instruction (CAI) to the present-day collaborative nature of online learning. While not comprehensive, the question 'How did we get here?' is adequately answered. The third chapter focuses on learning theories, including constructivism, andragogy, and the visual aural read-write kinesthetic (VARK). For budding online instructors unfamiliar with educational theory, this section provides a brief summary of the differences in these approaches and prepares the reader to better understand the strategies described later. This chapter continues to set the tone for the book as it distills easy-to-apply techniques to new or prospective online instructors. Experienced teachers, online or not, may find much of the content here to be somewhat obvious, but for those wishing for a broad overview of the field, this section offers a comprehensive understanding of the online instructor's roles and duties.

In the following two chapters, 'The Many Hats of the Online Instructor' and 'Who Are Our Online Learners?', the authors describe both the demographics and the expectations of these roles. In the first, they elaborate on how online instructors are simultaneously teachers, facilitators, instructional technologists, courses designers, writers, editors, counselors, and advisors. This is both impressive and familiar, with many of these same roles applying to face-to-face teaching. The reasons why individuals pursue online learning are explored in the next chapter, with insights offered about students who have learning disabilities or for whom English is a second language.

The next few chapters focus more specifically on techniques used by online instructors, including creating a collaborative environment for active learning and maintaining frequent contact with students. The authors focus on the EASy acronym derived from Bloom's Taxonomy, suggesting that students be required to evaluate, analyze and synthesize (in that order), resulting in a comprehensive final project (pp. 73-75). Specific examples of such assignments are offered.

The chapter titled 'Basics of Course Design' offers information about discussion boards, synchronous chat, and peer review, and deals with issues of intellectual property ownership and designing for students with disabilities. In terms of assessment, e-portfolios and group projects are emphasized over traditional testing, and the authors cite the importance of appropriate, encouraging, and honest feedback.

Communication is the topic of 'Online Interaction: Facilitator, Learners, and the Tools Used to Connect Them', with a focus on best practices in discussion boards, including the need to ask questions that require critical thinking and to make certain that all students participate in the conversation. This chapter also offers rhetorical strategies for instructors for making effective posts. For example, '[t]hose people who do not naturally use humor in daily verbal communication should not attempt it in written communications. Humor cannot be forced. It needs to be a part of the message writer's everyday personality in order to have it work well in text' (pp. 121-122). It concludes with a discussion of the concepts of possession, accessibility, and operability, explaining that students must have the proper technology, be able to access this technology consistently and easily, and be cognizant of the software/plugins that are appropriate or needed for the course.

Other chapters offer suggestions on maintaining a viable learning community and discuss the considerable amount of preparatory work required by an online instructor in terms of course design and administrative duties. The fact that enrollment numbers are maintained through initial contact and substantive activities beginning prior to the start of the semester is explained, as are methods to assist students struggling in the online environment. The reader also learns how to handle too-frequent emails and manage one's time as an online instructor.

The book concludes with chapters on helping students through problems both technical and academic; on finding employment as an online instructor; and on compiling (through examples) various resources and documents useful in course design.

The book's technical scope is somewhat limited, focusing on course management systems like Blackboard and Moodle - although these are rarely mentioned by name - and some Web 2.0 tools (e.g. wikis). Other potentially useful options like virtual worlds or social networking websites are not discussed.

However, *Making the Move to eLearning* offers the budding online instructor substantive advice in implementing an online course. Professors without prior experience who plan to take the initial plunge are likely to find at least some of the advice and hints outlined in this book to be useful and reassuring. This book offers an easy and comprehensive read for professors considering a move (or being pushed) into online learning. Certainly, a prospective online instructor will find the details of course design and the suggested methods to manage the many required tasks to be informative and eye-opening. This text offers a solid first step into the world of online teaching. With this specific purpose in mind, such a reader will certainly benefit from many of the ideas and procedures described. Lehmann & Chamberlin stress quality in education and offer a useful approach for any discipline that may appropriately be taught online.

Additionally, many of the concepts presented apply to face-to-face and hybrid courses as well, including the emphasis of projects over exams, using the EASy approach to lesson design, and considering how best to communicate with students. Regardless of the chosen format, instruction improves by applying learning theories to developing new and innovative teaching methods. Online or not, the techniques and approaches covered in *Making the Move to eLearning* are worthy of consideration.

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Better Teaching and Learning in the Digital Classroom

DAVID T. GORDON (Ed.), 2003

Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press

170 pages, hardback, ISBN 1 891792 12 2; paperback, 1 891792 16 4

The progressive march of technology has been changing all fields in society. Education is not an exception. The main editorial purpose of *Better Teaching and Learning in the Digital Classroom* is, editor David T. Gordon states, to present a discussion about 'the potential of powerful new technologies to transform K-12 teaching and learning' (p. 3). The core of this discussion aims at understanding how educators can use and make the most of the technologies they have available in schools. The experiences of a wide range of teachers, researchers and students are shared in the various chapters of this volume. The book is divided into eleven chapters. In the introductory chapter, Gordon starts with a useful overview of the entire book. Although published in 2003, the ideas to be found in this book are just as relevant today.

Oseas & Wood, in chapter two, raise an important point about multiple literacies as a key factor for the millennium generation, one that is fast becoming a fundamental set of skills. They describe the concept of multiple literacies, why they are important and how imperative it is for teachers and students to deal with them. Multiple literacies are defined as 'students' ability to identify and analyze messages embedded in a variety of different modalities, as well as the capacity to use these media to create and express their own messages' (p. 11). Nowadays students are accustomed to close contact with a wide variety of technologies and media outside of school. Therefore it is crucial to teach children to understand these different resources (so they can transform the information they obtain into knowledge), and use these technologies for effective learning. Oseas & Wood stress that teachers have an important role to play. For me, this position resonates with critical theorist and media analyst Kellner's earlier claim that teachers will have to change their 'basic tenets, to deploy the new technologies in creative and productive ways, and to restructure schooling to respond constructively and progressively to the technological and social changes that we are now experiencing' (Kellner, 2000, n.p.). One of the most important literacies – according to Oseas & Wood – is knowing how to deal effectively with information (this is often described as 'digital literacy') and the Internet. It is important to teach students to search, locate,

analyze, select and process reliable information and sources as distinct from unreliable information and sources. The central issue is how to teach students to use information media and digital technologies *critically*. Teachers will have to help, guide and support students so they can 'succeed in today's media-saturated culture' (Semali, 2000, as cited by Oseas & Wood, p. 13). As Oseas & Wood explain, 'the key is to shift the focus from becoming more informed to becoming better informed' (p. 14) - that is, to help students to be selective and critical and to always evaluate multiple perspectives from the information they search for and gather. For me, this resonates with the fact that teachers may face the greater challenge since they are not digital natives but digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001). Nowadays, according to Oseas & Wood, teachers 'know how to teach but are not fluent in new technologies', and they have the challenge to 'teach students who are fluent with technologies' (p. 11). The teacher's mission is to imbue students with the necessary skills to learn how to learn. As Tapscott (1998) explained well over a decade ago, 'never before has it become more necessary that children learn to read, write, and think critically. It's not just point and click. It's point, read, think, click' (Tapscott, 1998, as cited by Oseas & Wood, p. 19).

In chapter four, Sadowski alerts us to several websites that offer students essays in all the school subjects, bringing to the fore the issue of plagiarism. Some operate by means of monetary payment, others provide essays for free. It is a challenge for teachers to detect and stop this sort of behavior; there is a strong 'need to discourage students from using the Internet as a source of unoriginal work' (p. 43). But why do students resort to plagiarism and cheating? Sadowski presents a study from Holman (2001) that outlines some reasons for students to use the Internet for accessing ready-made work. According to Holman, plagiarism occurs not simply because students are looking for an easy way out - many times it is due to a lack of confidence in their own capabilities. From this perspective, students 'who are under pressure, who want to perform, and who are afraid that what they're going to produce isn't good enough' (Holman, 2001, cited by Sadowski, p. 45) may resort to the Internet for help. Some teachers simply use Google to trace unoriginal work; others use purpose-designed online tools like Turnitin.com - although the latter kinds of services bring with them additional issues. For example, Carbone (2001, referred to by Sadowski) alerts us to the fact that submitting students' work to Turnitin.com violates their rights, and in this way, teachers are working within a default context of mistrust. This issue is certainly a pressing one that requires sustained discussion. In my opinion, and based on my own experiences, a teacher who suspects unoriginal work in a student assignment has to check and validate that the work is indeed unoriginal. Nevertheless, and I fully agree with Sadowski in this respect, the best way for teachers to fight against plagiarism is to alert students to its dangers and consequences. Leading on from this, and perhaps most importantly, 'students need to be taught how to cite sources correctly' (p. 46). Sometimes plagiarism occurs because students are unaware of which citation conventions to use in which cases. In addition, both teachers and students may use the Internet in a collaborative manner to find information about how to prevent or circumvent plagiarism. There are a number of ideas outlined in this chapter (pp. 46-49) which appear quite easy to implement, and that I plan to put into practice with my students in my own classes (e.g. give students more assignments that require explanation rather than description, as well as problem-solving, and decision making; work with students throughout the writing process; and engage students in challenging, technology-based assignments that directly educate about plagiarism).

Another key element pertaining to digital classrooms that is discussed in this book is communication between schools and parents. A number of chapters touch on this theme and provide some examples of implemented experiences with technologies that led to improved communication (see e.g. chapters by Niguidula, Franz, and Norris & Soloway). The focus of these chapters tends to be on ways to better communicate students' progress to parents and caregivers. Since technologies are designed to 'help people store, retrieve, communicate, and organize large amounts of information' (Niguidula, p. 28), having digital portfolios as a way of communicating students' progress becomes an option. Why digital? Because artifacts are easily stored, and the portfolio itself is accessible from anywhere and at any time. As Franz explains in chapter five, parents can be at home with their children, checking on their progress at school via the Internet. This encourages increased involvement by parents in their children's achievements by means of them 'learn[ing] about the process and see[ing] the finished products of their children's schoolwork' (p. 54), and engendering a spirit of cooperation between parents and schools. In short, parents have a 'way to participate more fully in their children's education' (p. 56). Franz concludes that the use

of technologies for 'school-home collaborations is creating a real sense of community around students' learning' (p. 55), which is generally accepted as beneficial.

In chapter nine, by Norris & Soloway, reference is made to a study of using handheld digital devices in student learning. With such gadgets, students can easily bring school into their homes and to their parents. Handhelds are portable devices that allow children to accomplish a great number of tasks in a relatively easy and typically enjoyable way. This kind of device seems, 'in contrast to desktop/laptop technologies, ... [to] more effectively address the major concerns of teachers' (p. 111). These concerns include students' outcomes, curriculum content and planning, classroom management and the learning environment. Using handhelds is also a fast, easy and effective way for students to build their digital portfolios by allowing writing and rewriting and working collaboratively, and by facilitating the review process. This in turn helps improve assessment processes. Considering the duality of digital natives/digital immigrants currently found in most classrooms, teachers might feel a little overwhelmed while introducing new technologies in their classrooms, thinking they have to make tremendous changes in order to introduce handhelds into their learning contexts. But what is needed is simply, as Norris & Soloway explain in their chapter, 'evolution not revolution' (p. 117). They advise that teachers can use their 'existing curriculum and existing instructional strategies – with just a little change' (p. 117). According to the authors' own experiences, handhelds are easy to use and have low maintenance needs, and readily fit into existing learning practices. After all, it is not about technology, it is about how we use it to enhance teaching and learning practices that really matters when all is said and done.

A very important question is raised by Gordon in chapter seven: accessibility and how technologies can contribute to a more equal access to the curriculum for every student. Technologies can fill 'gaps' by providing alternative ways for students to learn. Digital devices and digital content are more flexible and manageable than paper formats because they can be adapted to students' needs, reducing barriers to learning by means of 'changeable fonts, glossaries, concept maps, multimedia tools, illustrations, tutorial aids, and e-notebooks' (p. 85), and reducing the gap between curriculum access and knowledge achievement across students by allowing content adaptation in a more dynamic way. A barrier to learning is often created by educational publishers and the textbooks and resources they produce with respect to copyrighted material. It is not always easy to obtain the consent of publishers to reproduce texts and resources in digital form for using with students with particular learning needs. Many publishers only make available content in paper-based forms (which are not flexible or adaptable). Copyright law is unclear in this respect, and does not clarify who can be considered a person with disabilities and what rights she or he has in terms of digitally adapting print-based materials. However, increased availability of digital content online produced by a range of providers means teachers can meet students' needs more easily and much more quickly than has been the case in the past. In addition, digital technologies and networks also provide opportunities for students from different locations in the world to get in touch with each other, and share experiences and information. Teachers can also get in touch with peers, trading their experiences and lesson ideas and content, and obtaining new ideas about how to improve their teaching, in particular when working with students with special educational needs. In short, as Gordon argues, digital classrooms are able to rely less on commercially produced, paper-based resources for teaching and learning; they offer flexibility and adaptive capabilities that can help the teacher reach a wider range of students with different learning needs. Digital resources are also easier to share, re-use, rebuild, update and improve.

Building upon this accessibility theme, Moore, in chapter six, introduces us to the concept of 'usability' within educational web environments. He calls our attention to the fact that an educational environment online cannot just be about content storage and content availability. The environment must be one where there is attention to ease of use, and it must be accessible, flexible and adaptable to the teacher's needs and methods. Regardless of how technological and rich an environment may be, if it does not show a clear benefit for the teacher or the students, it will not be used or useful. As Moore explains, 'as educational web environments have grown in sophistication, our ability to perceive their direct benefit to our teaching seems to have decreased' (p. 67). That is, due to the variety of available tools it is often 'difficult to map the tool onto a specific task' (p. 67). In order to create rich, useful and truly educational environments, the author describes ten fundamental characteristics that instructional designers should consider (these include, for example, exploratory and guided approaches to content, clear relationships to real

classroom tasks, helpful models of practice, and different modes of experiencing information, among others).

Another crucial aspect of digital classrooms that is addressed in this collection, in chapter ten by Gordon, is related to the importance of technology for professional development and for supporting communities of practice. Quoting Wenger, Gordon explains that '[c]ommunities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (p. 129). Online communities of practice assume strong significance by providing a better way for teachers to communicate with each other, and to share their professional knowledge through both formal and informal web-based networks. These kinds of online communities also enhance communication between novices and experts – this is important because it helps novices to become more confident in their own work and understanding. It is a robust way of sharing ideas and discussing issues related to the teachers' work and profession. As Gordon argues, 'technology provides the means to create and support teachers in learning communities' (p. 129) which can be extended beyond a single school's borders into a broader network across the world. Another advantage of online communities is the flexibility people have to join from anywhere, and at any time, because as we all know, 'it takes enormous commitment of resources and time to bring people together in frequent, face-to-face settings' (p. 129). This issue is avoided or certainly minimized when teachers are able to meet and work collaboratively online. Indeed, within an online community, any teacher or researcher can follow up a discussion and collaborate with others in their own time, since needed information is available and stored online. Online meetings, with a good facilitator, can be very profitable, and online courses for teachers offer an excellent solution to the constraints of time and space, thereby giving everyone the chance to enhance their professional skills.

While the benefit of online learning/training for adults is clear, Yarnall, in chapter eight, questions the benefits of online learning at the K-12 level. The main reason why students seek online courses is because they normally offer more flexibility in terms of time and location. Some students also mention the quality factor, or the fact that nearby schools don't have the right resources. In many situations, students at this level use online courses as a complement to their studies. Those who participate in an online class seem to expect some variations and adaptations from the traditional classroom. Indeed, Yarnall argues that no matter what the level of education or field of learning is, online instructors must change their pedagogy to meet students' needs and expectations and fit the curriculum into the technological support/network they are using. These changes can include, for example, 'engag[ing] learners more interactively in activities and discussion' (p. 108), providing and encouraging good 'teacher-student communication' (p. 97), encouraging 'active interaction that involve[s] more than completing assignments and emailing them' back (p. 97), and asking 'students to complete a lot of small assignments rather than a few large ones' (p. 97). One issue concerning school students taking online courses is related to assessment; again, and according to Yarnall, different methods must be applied, such as asking students to deliver a portfolio of work collected over an extended period of time. However, it is not just about how a teacher/instructor adapts an online course and assessment; an online student must have an intrinsic motivation for participating in, and completing, an online course. It is also important, according to Yarnall, to consider whether K-12 students have the maturity to engage in an online learning situation (I.E. are they truly capable of independent learning?). As a natural conclusion, Yarnall closes her chapter with the claim that 'it's not about the technology. It's about people' (p. 109).

We live, learn, work, communicate, and interact within a networked society. In the chapter by Franz & Gragert, the authors claim: 'With new technologies, narratives and images of world events near and far are available to students around the world with unprecedented immediacy' (p. 141). With easy access to technologies, communication, collaboration and interaction online (in a synchronous or asynchronous mode) is facilitated, creating a significant number of learning opportunities. Students, teachers, and schools from all over the world are at a distance of a click from each other. Franz & Gragert, in chapter eleven, offer some outlines for a philosophical framework for international learning communities. These 'ideas and perspectives are essential for building positive global education collaborations' (p. 149) which help students to discover other cultures, languages, concerns, challenges, ideas, resources, and opportunities, and therefore to

achieve a better knowledge. As the authors explain, students' 'online collaborations enable them to develop positive construction of knowledge of the world with global peers' (p. 154).

In short, this book reminds us clearly that education agents need to be aware of world changes and, even if slowly, enact the right adaptations in their pedagogy to better fit the curriculum to today's society – no matter whether delivering learning in a traditional or a digital classroom.

As a teacher myself, I continuously attempt to change my ways of teaching by adapting my methods and strategies in order to introduce digital technologies into the classroom. It is not always easy, but teachers can't stay behind. Virtual environments, the social web, Web 2.0 tools are a constant in digital natives' daily lives. Teachers who are digital immigrants must catch up and engage with our students in mutually supportive and enriching ways.

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Online Professional Development for Teachers: emerging models and methods

CHRIS DEDE (Ed.), 2006

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296 pages, ISBN-10 1891792733, paperback, ISBN-10: 978 1891792741 hardback

This collection contains ten edited versions of invited papers presented by researchers and practitioners at the 2005 conference 'Evolving a Research Agenda for Online Teacher Professional Development' hosted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The chapters describe ten exemplary online teacher professional development models that have a substantiated record of success, as explained on the conference website (which in many ways continues to act as a useful 'addendum' to the book). According to the editor, Chris Dede, this book offers 'a valuable diagnostic picture about the current state of high-end online teacher development' (p. 5) by presenting the work from groups based in universities (Harvard, Indiana, California Santa Cruz, Lesley, Montana State) or various organizations (TERC, Liaison for the Learning to Teach with Technology, American Museum of Natural History, WGBH Educational Foundation), or run by independent consultants. The 2005 conference website makes available two documents that may be of additional interest to readers, too: (1) 'An Overview of Current Findings From Empirical Research on Online Teacher Professional Development' (the title of the book's opening chapter, which presents an extensive review of empirical research on online teacher professional development); and (2) a 'Research Agenda For Online Teacher Professional Development'. This second document identifies key areas of online teacher professional development that are deemed under-researched and/or under-developed. Other related materials can also be accessed at the conference website, at <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~uk/otpd/index.htm>.

Models presented in the book follow a template provided by Dede that helps to organize each chapter's structure and that facilitates making comparisons across models. In short, this template included the following items: sponsor, audience, content, pedagogy, media, and assessment, evaluation and research. Chapter two looks at one organization's success in targeting a variety of teachers and administrators from school districts to state departments of education and universities,

claiming that 'it is the quality of the content, educational design and instruction that determines the value of professional development' (p. 47). Chapter three, titled 'Piaget Goes Global', takes up the issue of ensuring changes in professional practice through the lens of the WIDE World project to describe action both at the personal and institutional levels to promote change. This model stresses the importance of 'networked technologies that diminish the drawbacks of traditional professional development' (p. 67).

The next four chapters describe a range of online professional development models in a variety of settings. This includes an account of a PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) television program ('TeacherLine') focused on secondary mathematics teaching and including rich data concerning teachers' opinions about course components and important reflections about the program's sustainability efforts. Another of these chapters focuses on the third-year experience of a model involving mentoring new science teachers for success, with a strong focus on asynchronous mentoring and 'collaborative, dialog-driven environments centered around science and student learning' (p. 105). Another chapter describes a master's program in science education conducted fully online, with hands-on investigation offline, and an emphasis on collaborative learning focused on subject-matter understanding for teaching and the importance of online facilitation to help teachers engage with content. The last of this set of chapters describes the American Museum of Natural History's set of science seminars that were developed by teams that included the museum's scientists, and which are based on the eCollege platform.

The concluding four chapters in this collection cover the application of research and theory to successful and relatively new online professional development initiatives. Chapter eight, titled 'Embedded Professional Development', deals with the need to help teachers engage in deep changes that include new uses of digital technologies in connection with innovative curriculum and lesson teaching that pursues a model that 'situates PD around teachers' experiences, such that it does not occur as an "add on" activity, but becomes seamlessly integrated into their everyday teaching practices' (p. 164). Chapter nine describes a learning architecture based on a three-fold theoretical foundation, where understanding comes from one's interaction with the environment, where cognitive conflict is a stimulus for learning, and where knowledge evolves through social negotiation (p. 177). Chapter ten covers a set of online professional development courses for K-12 teachers and the program's formal evaluation, which was conducted in 2003. And chapter eleven describes Milwaukee's web portal for professional development in education and focuses on learning communities' support and development.

Chapter twelve offers a synthesis of the models presented in this collection and identifies the challenges of providing effective professional development online. This chapter also discusses the difficulties related to the scalability of such programs by identifying and analyzing four challenges faced by online teacher professional development and offering recommendations for possible ways to deal with these difficulties. The authors identify four intertwined core tensions in the online teacher professional development field (design for incremental learning versus design for transformation; difficulties among stakeholders' agendas; customization versus generalizability; and research versus program evaluation), and articulate the influence of these tensions in online professional development programs by stressing the challenges faced by the Milwaukee Public Schools Professional Support Portal (presented in detail in the previous chapter).

However, it must be said that this collection of models covers only US experiences, and it is not clear why Chris Dede took this particular route. In any case, readers may wonder how experiences from the Open University (UK) [1], the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED, Spain) [2] and Third World organizations would contribute to the research questions raised and the models presented in the book, or how work towards refining online teaching and learning from these non-US-based organizations would introduce new tensions within the universe and the categories explored in the book. Moreover, the experiences portrayed in the book, despite their many positive aspects, seem to equate distance learning with models based on structured 'packages' of online initiatives and practices. It is understandable that there are institutional and operational factors that have justified such perspectives, particularly the large number of teachers in need of professional development and the desire to replicate successful initiatives. However, it seems important to inquire about other possibilities available within the online learning arena these days - in particular, ones that would be more in line with the role played by the active 'user' in Web 2.0 environments, echoing key-constructs from cyberculture theories such as the 'decentering' of

experiences, whereby ‘collectives’ are increasingly becoming ‘the unit of production, competence, intelligence’ (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p.11).

It seems important, too, to give space to experiences that pay attention to looking for new ways to orchestrate learning from students’ perspectives (in this case, teachers engaged in ongoing professional development) and their input into the process, identifying relevant new content, posing questions, and obtaining feedback and evaluations from their perspectives to inform and sustain the ongoing development of online learning experiences so that these courses or programs may take the best advantage of two main pillars of online learning experiences: real-time two-way communication, and students’ autonomy. For me, more effective online professional development requires teachers to open up space for students’ contributions, while still keeping close control over the course evolution, and yet – at the same time – working to transform these contributions (articles, book chapters, content generated in discussion forums, videos, etc.) into central elements of the course content and activities. Bringing students to the center of the stage of online professional development (along with decentering institutional roles) seems to be a powerful way to challenge current teacher-driven models and brings important new tensions to this evolving field of research (e.g. methodologies and technological tools for teachers’ meaningful participation, and therefore new roles for course designers in developing new courses).

In concluding, it is important to say that this book is a rich source of data about a range of US-based experiences in online teacher professional development that may be of interest to professors, graduate students, policy makers and institutions operating in this field, who may keep in mind the contextual challenges implicated in transferring best practices presented across the chapters from one context to another. The model descriptions are very rich and they even demonstrate the authors’ efforts to employ some critical lenses on their own hard and much-valued work – constituting, indeed, ‘usable knowledge’, which is defined so aptly on the conference website as ‘knowledge that generates tools, materials, and curricula that are then used and further studied in practice’.

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Notes

[1] See <http://www.open.ac.uk/cpd/index.php?q=node/10>

[2] See, for example, http://www.isatt.org/ISATT-papers/ISATT-papers/Dominguez_Teachersformationusingtheirexperience.pdf

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