Handbook of Online Learning (2nd Edition)
(Book Review)

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Edited by Kjell Erik Rudestam and Judith Schoenholtz-Read
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Edited by Rudenstam and Schoenholtz-Read, the second edition of the Handbook of online learning (2010) provides an extension to the already rich content of the first one. By including new chapters that analyzed recent topics in the area of online learning, such as globalization, the ethics dimension and the psychology of online learning, open sources possibilities, and the use of new media technologies for teaching and learning, the book constitutes a valuable piece of literature for any library committed to the online learning scenario, and a precious source for instructors, administrators and IT support teams.

The editors are experts in psychology and education, which gives them the academic credentials to support the research and analysis presented in the book. Judith Schoenholtz-Read (EdD Counseling Psychology UBC) is a member of the Psychology Program at the Fielding Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, California. Kjell E. Rudestam (PhD) is the Associate Dean of the School of Psychology at the same institution.

The book starts with a reflection on the promising growth of adult education around the world. The novelty of this approach resides in the fact that this book targets the new challenges that online brings to the field of teaching and learning, where the learner is at the centre and where information technologies serve not only as resources, but also as possibilities for interaction, motors for critical thinking and opportunities for connecting learning and the workplace.

As the use of Web 2.0 technologies increases in the educational arena, the concept of learning also evolves. From the learner’s perspective, it requires an open mind and a disposition to access and share knowledge. From the instructor approach it demands a different understanding of the learner and his/her approach to knowledge. From the institution point of view, it requires the compilation of policies that will support access to open sources, and an innovative analysis of funding resources.

The book is divided in two big sections following the traditional division of knowledge: theory (philosophy) and practice. The first section of the book includes the different perspectives of nine theorists in the area of online learning with regard to topics such as tele-learning, culture & community implications for online environments, social systems, globalization, ethics and research. The online learning phenomena is framed not only as a tool (that implies synchronous and asynchronous activities), but also as a learning possibility that has radically transformed the way that knowledge is accessed, shared and produced.

The second part of the book focuses on the implementation of online teaching and learning. The editors have divided this section in three areas that target the interest of course developers, instructors and students, and administrators and IT support teams. From a technological perspective, probably the most significant and innovative chapter of this part of the book is chapter 12, which presents an interesting analysis of the use and design of intelligent tutoring systems available for course developers and students (from Web 2.0 to virtual reality) in the framework of the 21st century.

From the students’ and instructors’ point of view, probably the most useful chapter in this section is chapter 15,
where new support techniques and learning strategies to improve online teaching and learning are suggested. Three very useful scorecard measures to examine institutional, instructors’ and students’ readiness for online teaching is presented, where strategies such as institutional mission, peer collaboration among instructors and students’ learning management techniques are stated.

In the global environment where online education is delivered, shared and analyzed, including a chapter that will address issues such as accreditation and learning quality was a must. Chapter 18 addresses precisely this challenges and provides a framework of conduct for those institutions doing the transformation between face to face teaching to online delivery. Issues of students’ funding are presented and practical tips are included.

The final chapter of the book offers a logical inclusion of central role that virtual libraries are playing in online learning. The author in this chapter analyzes the new conception of library as the virtual space where not only texts can be accessed, but also text messages, images, and virtual spaces can be explored. Interesting to note here that, as multimedia resources become available to the instructor and the learner, the possibility of ownership of knowledge is transformed while the capability of accessing it grows beyond physical limits. The library is no longer a real place in a geographical setting, but a virtual reality limited only by the imagination and the capabilities of cyberspace.

In addition to its various analyses, the book includes very useful references for further reading and exploration. Even if a proper chapter where conclusions and further research are presented is missing, these materials make the book an important teaching tool for students and others working in education, learning design, educational technologies, and technology policies. Given the reviewer’s background in e-learning policies for higher education institutions, the investment that Rudestam and Schoenholtz-Read have made to establish the theoretical-practical stage of online learning is appreciated. The work of the authors in this book promises to guide both experts and researchers in the exploration and analysis of online learning.