Delivering Learning on the Net: the Why, What & How of Online Education
(Book Review)

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Online education (OE) is growing rapidly because it provides learners opportunities to learn anywhere and anytime with access to the Internet. However, some online educators are faced with the challenges of delivering courses online. Martin Weller’s (2002) Delivering Learning on the Net: the Why, What & How of Online Education provides guidelines for four types of readers to achieve online learning. First, it addresses educators who wish to start, continue to develop, and deliver online classes. Second, it helps policymakers who are in charge of online learning by “taking a broad overview of the relevant issues from assessment to technology and pedagogy to e-commerce” (p.2). Third, it assists business people offering online instruction or training. Finally, it targets a general audience including those people who are interested in the change of online education.

The book is broken into three sections:

Section 1 incorporates four chapters which take a broad ‘view of the Net and its relation to education.’ In Chapter 1, (“Why the Net is significant”), the author began with analyzing previous educational technologies, such as: broadcast multimedia and multi-media CD-ROMs. Then, he discusses some reasons that make the Internet more significant than previous technologies. At the end of this chapter, the author provides the lessons for implementation to guide the instructor and staff when implementing online learning. In Chapter 2, (“Exploring some of the e-learning myths”), deals with the issues related to the Internet and education, such as: the commercialization of education, the globalization of education, and the potential demise of the campus university. At the end of this chapter, the author provides useful lessons recommendation to the instructors and staff who plan to implement online education. In Chapter 3, (“Lessons from e-commerce”), the author examines the trends in “e-business and e-commerce” to see how they might have a long-term effect and most applicable to education. The author examines issues in e-commerce that might be appropriate for educational purposes such as “clicks and mortar, the reason behind the e-commerce boom and bust…” (p. 49). The author discusses lessons for implementation in this chapter, which are provided for e-commerce purposes but some of them can be applied to education in both individual educator and organization. Chapter 4 (“Motivation for adopting the Net”) focuses on the reasons to motivate educators to adopt the Net in teaching. Also, the author provides lessons for implementation in this chapter that will be beneficial for educators who create online courses.

Section 2, is comprised of five chapters which deal with ‘online education by looking at issues relating to the implementation of online courses.’ Chapter 5 (“Pedagogies for online teaching”) discusses the pedagogy of online teaching by employing theory and practice such as “constructivism, resource based learning, collaborative learning, problem based learning, narrative based learning, and situated learning” (p. 79). The lessons for implementation in this chapter provide guidelines for an instructional designer to consider when creating online courses. Chapter 6 (“Communication”) emphasizes the author’s key elements of online communication. For example, the author explains that asynchronous is one of the most important tools that provides several benefits for education. However, synchronous communication is important when combined with asynchronous communication for the purpose of using computer mediated communication [CMC] in online learning environments. When developing CMC courses, the instructional designers should consider the lessons for implementation in this chapter because they provide useful guidelines. The author recommends the instructional designers match the objectives of the course to meet the needs of the learners, using as many asynchronous tools that are appropriated to the course content. Chapter 7 (“Networking methods”) addresses the changes educators
face in “working practice” with the new technologies. With the advance of technology, the educators need to change their ways for delivering online courses. The book suggests working with teams to create online courses and adapting the open source approach. The lessons for implementation in this chapter also help the instructional designer to create appropriate course material for online courses. Chapter 8 (“Assessment”) outlines the issues related to assess the online pedagogy. Since online education uses the nature of technology for delivering teaching and learning, this chapter’s goal is to recommend the educators to assess online to increase the quality of online learning. Chapter 9 (“Technology and media”) discusses the types of media that can be employed in online courses including advantages and disadvantages of each: the technologies and media are: “text and images, audio and video, CAL, virtual worlds, intelligent agents, data mining, course delivery system and [Extensible Markup Language] (XML)” (p. 144).

Section 3 provides the summary of the previous sections. Chapter 10 (“A framework for classifying online courses”) describes a framework for classifying online courses. This framework includes pedagogy and technology in online courses. Each course can be categorized by where it falls on a “low-high technology axis and a “didactic-constructivist pedagogy axis” pp. 160-161). The framework includes four categories: high technology – didactic, low technology – didactic, low technology – constructivist, and high technology – constructivist” (p. 161). The lessons for implementation in this chapter “determine the audience for the course and develop the course…, determine the presentation and production costs…, and appreciate the influence of the scale of presentation” (p. 161). Chapter 11 (“Birth of the new”) explores present and future issues resulting from the Internet. When employing the Internet in education, educators need to consider new ways of utilization; such as: the home video and cinema industries as an analogy to online and campus based education. Also, educators have to keep in mind that when employing the Internet into organization they need to face many challenges. Online education will face big changes in a few years with “intellectual property and the rise of broadband access.”

Overall, this book is an excellent resource on theory, practice and research of online education. This book is organized very well so it helps the readers to understand lessons in each chapter. For instance, at the end of each chapter the author provides a summary in bullet points so the reader can recall what they have read for the entire chapter. Besides the chapter summary, the author gives helpful lessons for implementation, which help the readers to plan their outlines in creating online learning environments. They create their plans based upon the content of the chapters and some additional information. This book addresses the Net and it relation to education, creating and employing online courses, and the key issues surrounding online learning. I strongly recommend it to instructors, trainers, administrators, policymakers, and instructional designers who plan to move their courses online and who are teaching online but looking for some guidelines. Also, it might be useful resources for researchers, students, and the general population who are interested in technology changes, such as online education.