

## Relearning to E-learn: Strategies for Electronic Learning and Knowledge

(Book Review)

### **Reviewer:**

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### **Textbook Details:**

Relearning to E-learn: Strategies for Electronic Learning and Knowledge

Marcus Bowles

<http://www.mup.unimelb.edu.au/ebooks/0-522-85130-4/>

Melbourne University Press

2004

The book Dr. Marcus Bowles presents is the result of a major research project Learning to e-learn. The research was conducted by the Unitas Knowledge Centre in Australia. The book is a team effort and contributions were delivered by a dozen university and corporate researchers.

The project also produced a major report on the investigative research, a suite of tools, a manual, case studies, and supplementary publications all to be found at the Unitas-portal.

Relearning to e-learn focuses on how to implement efficient and effective e-learning in organisational settings: corporate e-learning. Although the contents of the book is written with that audience in mind, researchers and practitioners in educational context may find abundant information and knowledge that suit their needs to construct e-learning conditions.

The intention of the author is *to deconstruct some popular misconceptions and re-explores some basic principles of managing e-learning for individual businesses and community development*. He fears that the trend to trivialise the concept will inevitably lead to its fall, whereas deepening and exploring it will help to achieve tangible benefits for individuals, organisations and communities.

*Chapter 1: What is e-learning* gives an extensive description on processes, content and objects, (communication) technologies, trends in the use of the internet, bandwidth in relation to applications and emerging technologies such as handheld and wireless devices. It also defines the field and presents that in a clear and robust model. The book defines e-learning as a learning experience involving the acquisition or transfer of knowledge delivered or transacted through electronic means. In this definitions distance and flexible learning are not necessarily enclosed. This will be an eye-opener for those who combine the concept of both learning modes automatically with electronic delivery. Another pleasant surprise is the demystification of the metadata-hype. Dr. Bowles questions the reusability of learning objects as they have meaning in context. He also suspects (p. 8) the large vendors of IT and e-learning systems of fuelling the concepts popularity. A point to ponder! Every chapter concludes with a leading principle. Chapter 1 delivers: E-learning encompasses a wide diversity of practices in a dynamic, rapidly changing field. It must therefore be defined to encompass all learning experiences involving the acquisition or transfer of knowledge. Would it not if the field was more at rest and evolutionary?

*Chapter 2: The e-learning marketplace* gives an overview on trends in e-learning but is troubled by the absence of a single definition. In such swamps it is hard to combine data to draw conclusions. In some cases, e.g. the S-curve on page 22, we could have done with more data to underpin the conclusions in this chapter. To some readers the preference for statistical evidence from the Australian continent and Asia may be less interesting than that of Europe and the America's.

I read *Chapter 3: Promises and Pitfalls* with great interest and pleasure and recommend every educational technologist to learn it by heart or to pin in to the bedroom wall. It gives an excellent overview of the e-learning ecosystem and describes the needs and expectations of all stakeholders. Figure 3.1. on page 49 on Blended E-Learning will no doubt be found in future publications. I think the part that dealt with concerns of ROI could better have been embedded in Chapter 12: Building Effective and Efficient e-learning.

*Chapter 4: From competencies to capabilities* summarises what is common knowledge today and also provides some input on the limitations of a competency approach. Nice to have in this day and age where everybody seem to proclaims this route. *Principal 4: Old paradigms based on e-training need to be revised to ensure that a focus on individual competence related to performance is augmented by targeting identity capabilities, which build purpose, shared meaning and a culture of collaboration.* I particularly like that because it reinforces the notion that learning is the collaborative construction of concepts. Carl Bereiter beautifully integrates this knowledge into his work in Toronto, Canada. Also missing is reference to the work of Jonassen on computers as mindtools. No doubt we will find reference to those two and more in the next edition.

*Chapter 5: Dimensions of knowledge* is a must for all. It brings the main issues together in a tidy presentation. Nonaka's knowledge spiral would have fitted nicely in this chapter and it still puzzles me why it wasn't used.

*Chapter 6: Generating Knowledge through learning* kindly summarises the different modes for learning and training and its (dis)advantages.

*Chapter 7: Individual Factors in E-learning Performance* lists what is known about cognition, intelligence and learning styles.

But why where these two chapters not bundled into one with the integration of the work of Lee Alley and Kate Jansak. They argue that instructional designers should learn more from the results of cognitive-psychological research and developed 10 'Principals of learning science' that embed the work of Bloom, Gardner and Gagne. A lead to follow I think.

Chapter 8: Toward Collaborative E-Learning, Chapter 9: Forces of Transformation, Chapter 10: Organisational E-Learning: Principles and Pressures and Chapter 11: Transactions and E-Services will please many that also feel the heat of the action. It gives, more than the other chapters, concrete guidelines and reaches out to the practitioner. I felt a bit lost though when studying figure 9.2 and 9.3 on page 122.

Chapter 12: Effective and Efficient E-learning deals with evaluation and costs. It gives concrete direction for evaluating e-learning activities but failed in my view on delivering at least a foundation for the evaluation of costs and return. Much excellent groundwork has been done here e.g. the publication of Greville Rumble: The costs and effectiveness of Open and Distance Learning from Kogan Press.

*Relearning to e-learn; Strategies for electronic learning and knowledge* is a good book and should be in your shelf for reference. It is critical and shows a number of fresh views and approaches. It integrates and combines disciplines in a pragmatic and leisurely way and also gives a good overview on most relevant domains. It delivers handy lists and some nice tables and figures. It is not easy reading, the language is condensed and littered with reference sometimes.

I do not find it a very tidy book, in the sense that it sometimes lacks consistency in style and depth of information. But maybe that is weaved in when you work with a team! Worrying is the omission of reference of much excellent research in the field in Europe and North America. Is our research not globally accessible today?