Book review

Adding some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ activities for motivating and retaining learners online

Maggie Hartnett
Massey University

Bonk, C. J., & Khoo, E. (2014). *Adding some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ activities for motivating and retaining learners online*. Bloomington, IN: Open World Books (pp. 367).

With the increasing ubiquity of online and blended learning, more and more educators are being asked to teach online, often without any specific specialist training. *Adding some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ activities for motivating and retaining learners online* by Bonk and Khoo is a practical 'how to' guide for motivating learners in online and blended learning contexts. Drawing from a rich base of research into motivation, this book provides a framework and an extensive set of associated online instructional activities that anyone involved in teaching online, from primary through to tertiary education, can use to engage and motivate learners.

The book is divided into three sections. It begins by introducing the TEC-VARIETY framework that provides the structure for the remainder of the book. The authors have developed this framework by considering emerging technologies that encourage the engagement and motivation of learners in pedagogically appropriate ways. The name, TEC-VARIETY, is a mnemonic that describes the ten underpinning motivational principles. They are:

1. **T**one/Climate: Psychological Safety, Comfort, Sense of Belonging
2. **E**ncouragement: Feedback, Responsiveness, Praise, Supports
3. **C**uriosity: Surprise, Intrigue, Unknowns
4. **V**ariety: Novelty, Fun, Fantasy
5. **A**utonomy: Choice, Control, Flexibility, Opportunities
6. **R**elevance: Meaningful, Authentic, Interesting
7. **I**nteractivity: Collaborative, Team-Based, Community
8. **E**ngagement: Effort, Involvement, Investment
9. **T**ension: Challenge, Dissonance, Controversy
10. **Y**ielding Products: Goal Driven, Purposeful Vision, Ownership. (p. 10)

In the second section, the authors outline their rationale for developing the framework, which is based on their combined three decades of research and teaching in web-based environments, and addresses low completion rates—one of the major issues associated with online education. What follows is a review of the theory and research that has learner retention and attrition as its central focus. Based on this discussion, the authors argue that motivation is a crucial factor that helps us to understand and explain learner dropout or persistence in online courses.

Having established the premise that motivation has a direct influence on online retention, the next chapter explores various motivational theories and concepts from four learning perspectives: behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, and sociocultural theory. Each of the associated psychological principles of the TEC-VARIETY framework is then linked to these differing views of human learning. For example, learning theory #3 (constructivism) is linked to framework principles #1 (tone/climate), #4 (variety), and #9 (tension). Mapping the framework principles to learning theories (summarised on page 42) enables the authors to present a compelling case for the need for those involved in online education to seriously consider and cater for the motivation of learners in online and blended environments. They also, importantly, remind the reader that no single motivational technique or strategy is the answer for all situations, and that a combination of strategies and approaches are needed.

The remainder of the book dedicates a chapter to exploring each of the 10 framework principles in some depth. The authors describe this as "a toolkit or online teaching guide" (p. 43). Each chapter starts with an introduction to the principle, followed by a brief overview of some of the web-based learning tools and resources that online instructors and designers could use to address it. The overview is followed by 10 specific, detailed online instructional activities that readers can adapt and apply to their own practice. In detailing each activity, the authors provide an explanation, practical advice and guidance, and ideas for variations and extensions. They close with several key instructional considerations (i.e., risk, time, cost, learner-centredness, and expected duration of the activity) that are designed to aid anyone involved in online and blended teaching to determine the appropriateness of an activity in a given context. Over the course of 10 chapters, 100+ online instructional activities are offered to the reader along with associated online tools and resources, practical examples, and suggestions. For ease of reference, the 100+ activities for TEC-VARIETY are summarised in a table in chapter 15 (pp. 292–301).

The book wouldn't be complete without some consideration of the role of instructor motivation. Common reasons for instructor reluctance to engage with and change online teaching practices are discussed briefly in chapter 14. Some ways to support change are also suggested.

As with any book that sets out to offer a 'toolkit' of online and blended teaching strategies to motivate and engage learners, some 'tools' will be more relevant than others, depending on the programme, course, curriculum, content, and context. As such, this book does not attempt to comprehensively cover the rich and complex nature of motivational theory and research in online learning contexts—or education in general. The strength of the book lies in its practical nature and the ability for readers to dip in and out of the various principles of the framework, easily locating strategies that they can apply to their own teaching.

Overall, *Adding some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ activities for motivating and retaining learners online* is a worthwhile read for teachers, instructors, designers, managers and administrators involved in online and blended learning at any level of education. This book is a useful resource to have readily available and has been endorsed by well-known online learning researchers such as Norm Vaughan and Rena Palloff. It can be downloaded for free from the Adding some TEC-VARIETY website http://tec-variety.com/.

Dr. Curtis Bonk is a professor of education at Indiana University, United States, which is well known for strength in instructional design.

Dr. Elaine Khoo is a research fellow at the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research at the University of Waikato, New Zealand.

Biographical notes

Maggie Hartnett
m.hartnett@massey.ac.nz

Maggie is a lecturer in the Institute of Education at Massey University, New Zealand, where she teaches in the areas of e-learning and digital technologies. Her research interests include motivation and engagement in digital environments, teaching and learning with digital technologies, electronic portfolios, support for digital learners, digital places, and spaces of learning. Maggie is an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*.