

Reviews

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HOLMES, B., & GARDNER, J. (2006). *E-learning concepts and practice*. London: Sage Publications (pp. xiii, 186).

This slim volume contains a considerable amount of information about the fast-changing and ever-expanding field of e-learning. Holmes and Gardner have assembled a wide-ranging book that has value on two levels. It is an up-to-date overview of e-learning for those who are new to the field with definitions and explanations of what, for many people, will be unfamiliar terms, and it is comprehensive in its coverage so that it provides an overview of the current state of the field.

With the globalization of commerce and the expansion of knowledge on the Internet, there is an increasing need for workers in the public and private sectors to be familiar with information and communication technologies. It is probably impossible to write a book today that covers all aspects of the fast-changing field of e-learning, but Holmes and Gardner provide a good starting point. The volume is aptly titled. The authors provide an explanation of current concepts in e-learning as well as about contemporary practice, particularly in educational settings. It is acknowledged the printed page is not an ideal medium through which to consider e-learning, so throughout the book there are references to Web sites and suggestions for online activities. *E-learning Concepts and Practice*

outlines new terms such as *communal constructivism* and *communal yottaspace* that are becoming increasingly central to the language of teaching and learning. To use this book effectively, it will be necessary to read it alongside an Internet-linked computer, to be able to move from the printed page to cyberspace and back again.

As a reference to the terminology of the field, *E-learning Concepts and Practice* will be useful. Aspects of e-learning such as its relevance for seniors, learners with special needs, and for lifelong learners are all covered in this surprisingly comprehensive survey of the field. There are also considerations of gender and cultural identity issues. Terms that occur frequently in the world of e-learning—*modelling, scaffolding, fading, blended learning, online simulations*—are all explained. However, it is the concept of communal constructivism that deserves particular attention as this is central to e-learning in schools and tertiary educational institutions. The authors outline several underpinning theories including behaviourism, cognitivism, and socio-constructivism together with the contributions of Bruner, Piaget, and Vygotsky, and there is a section on instructional design in the following chapter that covers the relationship between pedagogy and design in e-learning. From this, Holmes and Gardner define communal constructivism as:

... an approach to learning in which students construct their own knowledge as a result of their experiences and interactions with others, and are afforded the opportunity to contribute this knowledge to a communal knowledge base for the benefit of existing and new learners. (p. 85)

In communal constructivism, each member of the community learns with and from others as well as contributing resources to the learning community. The emphasis that is given to this concept is most welcome. The key feature of computers and, for that matter, e-learning in classrooms, is the provision of enhanced communication and, with it, the creation of environments within which new understandings can be fostered and developed. Holmes and Gardner make strong links between technology and pedagogy and, thereby, provide insights for teachers and learners of a new paradigm. They use the analogy of a river and a pipe to explain this:

In the traditional learning model students pass through a learning programme like water flowing through a pipe, with the tutors simply determining a goal, giving its direction and applying the pressure to get there. Once through such a course, there is no trace of them having been on it. Just as a pipe cannot be enriched by water traveling through it, the course remains unaffected by the learning of the students and by the tutors learning from the students. With little or no year-on-year transfer of knowledge between one set of students and the next, there is little prospect of the course itself

becoming a dynamic, learning artifact. (p. 86)

In a communal, constructivist learning environment, however, students contribute to the development of knowledge in a permanent form. In contributing to an e-learning course, students

... [leave] their own imprint on the course, their school or their university, and possibly the discipline—like a river enriching its flood plain each year by adding nutrients and minerals to the soils. The students' learning processes and outputs are captured and harnessed, the course is dynamic and self-generative and builds on new knowledge rather than simply repeating its original content. (p. 87)

This, in a nutshell, is the difference between traditional learning and e-learning. The analogy of the river and pipe provides a rationale for considering e-learning in classrooms. Traditional learning and e-learning are different and contemplation of the river and pipe analogy provides a good way to begin the process of changing paradigms. The e-learning paradigm, if adopted, will change teaching, change learning, and change the relationship between teaching and learning. As well as changing the relationship between teachers and learners, e-learning challenges the notion of schools. The future of e-learning, the authors believe, is about convergence denoted by the equation $e + m = u$ (or e-learning plus mobile computing = ubiquitous learning).

Holmes and Gardner have made a timely contribution to the field of education with a succinct, well-written overview of the relationship between technology and

pedagogy exemplified in e-learning. The real value of this book, however, lies in providing, through the multiple dimensions of e-learning that are outlined, a basis for a collaborative, constructivist paradigm and a new relationship between teachers, learners, and the organization and delivery of education.

PAECHTER, C., EDWARDS, R., HARRISON, R., & TWINING, P. (Eds.) (2001). *Learning, space, and identity*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing, in association with the Open University (pp. vi, 186).

The focus of this book is in the title: the central relationship between learning, space, and identity. The editors and contributors draw attention in a variety of contexts—some of them autobiographical—to the physical, mental, and emotional experience of learning in particular spaces and situations. A message that comes through clearly in this volume of essays is that, through the widespread availability of new technologies, we have the possibility of becoming disembodied identities online. The authors remind us that, in spite of the technological changes shaping learning, we are all “fundamentally embodied” and this embodiment is reflected in how we learn. Accordingly, it is argued, “We need to approach the use of new technologies both with a sense of excitement and with critique.”

This collection of essays is about changes in how people learn with reference to new technologies and the educational opportunities that come with them. In their introduction the editors explain, “Learning is no longer regarded as something that happens specifically

in educational institutions. We not only learn throughout our lives, but in a wide variety of places and spaces. These changes highlight the previously veiled relationship between learning, space and identity.”

The complexities of this relationship are explored in this very diverse set of essays which centre on the “information age” and “explosion of information” available to people with Internet access. A central concern guiding the contributors is the effect that information and communication technologies (ICT) will have on learning in the twenty-first century. The introduction of new technologies and possibilities of creating virtual presences in virtual spaces is considered in relation to traditional ideas that learning is something that happens in the mind—and that only happens to embodied learners occupying particular spaces. As embodied learners, it is argued,

We are moulded and altered by learning experiences that involve both the mind and the body; they affect our view of who we are and who we might become. In virtual space, where we are in many ways disembodied, alternative identities can be developed, which are powerful and empowering, and which in turn will affect what and how we can learn about ourselves and others.

These ideas are explored in an opening essay on identity in the context of the shift from the industrial to the knowledge age. The second essay considers theories of learning—symbol processing and situated cognition—and how these relate to knowledge and to learning situations. In learning to take part in particular social practices, it is claimed,

we contribute to the development of the practices. The following chapter provides a personal insight into learning from the perspective of an autistic person, focussing on what it is to be social and to comprehend the realization that other people have thoughts and feelings and minds beside, in this case, the author. This chapter points to the enormous difficulty of learning when it is difficult to understand social situations and the significance of human speech. Another level of learning is explored in a subsequent chapter that introduces a culturally different situation in which the process of teaching and learning music is important for imparting cultural knowledge.

The importance of ICT is explored in several chapters, including one by Seymour Papert of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), on changes in space/time relations on learning and identity. Papert outlines his personal development and the ways that this brought him to an understanding of the importance of certain ICT tools in children's learning. Of interest to many readers will be his observations on the role of computers in classrooms and the ways they can change how children learn. Another chapter considers a dimension of school life that has not had a lot of attention: the use of space in primary classrooms. In spite of the widespread introduction of computers to classrooms, the ways space is used in schools has not changed a lot. The need to reconsider the architecture of schools to adapt to new ways of teaching and learning using computers is highlighted as a neglected area of educational reform. One notable chapter addresses claims that online learning can transform education by promoting student-centred communication and collaboration. In

an examination of a situation in which sociocultural relationships inhibited the potential for change using ICT, it is demonstrated that the use of new technologies, in itself, is not necessarily able to transform ways of learning.

This collection of essays examines important relationships between embodied learners and new technologies. It focuses on the physical, mental, and emotional experiences of being a learner in learning spaces that have been made possible through online learning and the advance of the Internet. As such, this book will be of interest to students of communication, online learning, and the place of ICT in schools.