Book Review
The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips

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Citation: Boettcher, J.V., & Conrad, R.M. (2010). *The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 978-0-470-42353-0

Publisher Description: *The Online Teaching Survival Guide* offers faculty a wide array of theory-based techniques designed for online teaching and technology-enhanced courses. Written by two pioneers in distance education, this guidebook presents practical instructional strategies spread out over a four-phase timeline that covers the lifespan of a course. The book includes information on a range of topics such as course management, social presence, community building, and assessment. Based on traditional pedagogical theory, *The Online Teaching Survival Guide* integrates the latest research in cognitive processing and learning outcomes. Faculty with little knowledge of educational theory and those well versed in pedagogy will find this resource essential for developing their online teaching skills.

Increasing numbers of faculty are entering the online teaching arena. Some of these faculty members have prior experience in distance education, some have significant experience in teaching face-to-face courses, and some are new to the teaching enterprise. As a professor with many years of teaching experience who has recently moved to teaching some of my courses in an online environment, *The Online Teaching Survival Guide* offered the promise of improving my online courses.

The Online Teaching Survival Guide is directed primarily to those faculty members who are confronted with designing and teaching their first online class. The book is organized into three sections: Part 1 reviews basic teaching and learning concepts and principles, Part 2 is described as the "core" of the book providing practical, theory-based tips, and Part 3 focuses on the reflective process that should occur after teaching an online course. The theoretical basis of the book, that of constructivism, underlies each section of the book, including the pedagogical suggestions provided in Part 2.

Part 1 of the book provides a brief review of constructivism and such theorists as Vygotsky, Dewey, Piaget, Bruner, Brown, and Schank's schema theory. In essence, constructivist approaches argue that students actively construct or build knowledge by interacting with their environment. Such an approach will not be new to many who have been actively involved in the scholarship of teaching and learning. However, the foundation provided in Part 1 may be extremely useful for new faculty who have not had the opportunity to read the literature on effective pedagogy. Most noteworthy in Chapter 3 of Part 1 is the list of the 10 Best Practices for Teaching Online.   This list could easily be used as a checklist for ensuring that an online course has all of the elements required to meet the needs of the students.

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The authors describe Part 2 as the "core" of the book. Within these eight chapters, pedagogical tips are organized into four sections: Course Beginnings, the Early Middle, the Late Middle, and Closing Weeks. Unfortunately, I think only the newest of faculty to online teaching would find much in these chapters that goes beyond common sense. In addition, the pedagogical suggestions or tips are embedded within the text requiring a person to essentially read the entire section or chapter rather than quickly finding a helpful tip. Two gems in this part of the book are the rubric for evaluating weekly postings provided in Table 5.3 and the three part posting guide for encouraging peer dialogue on page 146. One failing of almost all of the pedagogical suggestions is that they lack the clarity that would allow another faculty member to utilize these suggestions. Almost all of these suggestions would be improved by providing details about how to implement these suggestions. Similarly, there is little to no evidence presented that would support the claim of these being pedagogically effective tips.

The last part of the book provides reflection suggestions for a faculty member who has completed teaching their first online class. The authors provide a useful list of common problem areas such as the problem of student assignments being repeatedly submitted late. Unfortunately, the suggestions – "you may decide on a policy of subtracting points for each day that an assignment is late" – may not provide new information for more experienced faculty members.

The Online Teaching Survival Guide provides a solid foundation in understanding constructivist theory and how such theories would apply to student learning. In addition, the book would be most appropriate for faculty members who have only taught in the traditional face-to-face classroom and who may be confronted with teaching an online course for the first time.