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THE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

BOOK REVIEW

Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies

Gamze Ozogul (Indiana University)

Budhai, S. S., & Skipwith K. B. (2016). *Best practices in engaging online learners through active and experiential learning strategies*. New York: Routledge. 112 pp. ISBN 978-1138670686. \$34.95 (Paperback). \$34.95 (E-book).

Keywords: online learners, engagement, strategies, active learning, experiential learning

In an estimate by Allan & Seaman (2016), 5.8 million students were enrolled in at least one distance course, and the number of students not taking at least one online class continues to decrease. With this increasing demand for online courses, researchers and practitioners continue to investigate best practices for designing online learning environments, and improving learner experiences in these environments. One of the most common design challenges in online learning environments is how to engage the learner, as learning engagement is a very important part of successful learning (Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003; Finn & Zimmer, 2012). In a study by Chen, Lambert, and Guidry (2010), results showed a positive relationship between the use of learning technology, student engagement, and outcomes of learning. Thus, how to engage students in online courses and how to use technology to facilitate or leverage student engagement has been a challenging issue for online instructors and instructional designers (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). As the number of students taking online courses increases, more instructors are asked to teach online, thus the following questions continue to surface related to student engagement: how to engage students in online courses by using capabilities of technology, what makes the best practices for meaningful learner experiences in online classes, and what strategies are available to make students active learners in online learning environments? The book *Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies* by Budhai and Skipwith (2016) is timely and sheds light on these questions by providing practical suggestions, guidelines, and concrete examples.

The audience for this book encompasses instructors and instructional designers working in online and/or blended

environments who are looking for ways to provide supportive, active, and engaging environments to learners. The book provides a variety of strategies to help online instructors make their learners' educational experiences meaningful and techniques to actively involve learners in the course content. Additionally, the book includes practical guidelines for activities and approaches to achieve engagement in online classes. The main strategies covered in the book are cooperative education, service learning, project- and scenario-based learning, gamification, and peer-cooperative learning. This book is an excellent resource for instructors and instructional designers who are looking for concrete examples about how to embed active and experiential learning strategies in their online learning environments, and how to engage learners with the learning materials by using capabilities of technology.

The authors begin the first chapter of the book by addressing the paradigm change and how it is reflected in online environments. The authors explain how the way learners process information has changed in the 21st century, and one-size-fits-all no longer seems to be effective. To make the learning meaningful to learners in online environments, the authors suggest that learners need to be actively engaged in their learning processes and learn through their experiences. The first chapter provides the rationale for why active learning and experiential learning experiences are necessary for online learners' engagement.

In the next chapter, the book provides a brief history of experiential learning and presents the Kolb (1982) experiential learning model. The authors also provide cooperative education, internships, practicums, service learning, and study abroad opportunities as examples of experiential

learning strategies. Additionally, by using a table the authors present examples of experiential learning applications in different disciplines. Later, the authors emphasize the rationale for integrating experiential learning strategies in online courses in order to prevent learners from feeling isolated, and also to provide them with ways to feel engaged with the course content. This chapter continues on by explaining various examples for embedding experiential learning strategies in online classes, with suggestions for how to use technology for documenting and leveraging facilitation of experiential or active learning in online classes (vlogging, blogging, VoiceThread by doodling, conferencing, LMS, video conferencing, doodle poll . . . etc.) The text is supported with screenshot examples of various technologies embedded in an active learning strategy. The chapter concludes with concrete suggestions for instructors on how to assist learners during these experiential experiences, such as service learning or internships, and provides a limited list of websites as suggestions for student placements for experiential learning.

Having discussed the definitions and types of active and experiential learning, the next three chapters of the book provide a deeper look into the specifics of some active and experiential learning strategies: project- and scenario-based learning (chapter 3) and gamification and social media (chapter 4). In chapter 3, the authors provide the definitions of project-based learning and scenario-based learning, and they also address motivation in relation to these two strategies as they influence the social context among learners in online learning environments. The authors offer concrete examples for how to use these strategies in online courses, and suggestions for using technology (e.g., creating web-based scenarios by using Articulate, using the internet to access current events to learn about a particular problem, or using scheduling tools to send reminders to project team members).

In chapter 4, the authors present gamification and social media as examples of submerging learning environments for interactive and rich learning. The authors initially focus on game play, psychology of play and learning, motivation in game play, game play styles, and player types. The authors then describe how to implement games in online learning environments and provide a table that offers discipline-specific examples, game types (website links), and the respective learning goals. The chapter later moves on to the role of social media in learning, and indicates that using social media technologies gives learners a voice and communication opportunities. The authors conclude the chapter by giving examples of social media tools and respective learning outcomes (for example, Pinterest can be used for bookmarking for learners to create and document their ideas visually).

In chapter 5, the authors focus on the benefits and challenges of building a social presence, and participatory and peer-learning

opportunities in online courses. The authors indicate that social presence is very important to engage learners in online classes, thus the online instructors should pay special attention to designing targeted opportunities for learners to address course content through active engagement and team projects. The authors explain in detail how to design team projects in online classes and describe the multiple tasks of the instructor while implementing online team projects. Later in the chapter, the authors provide examples of digital tools for collaboration, including examples of tools for communication (Google Hangouts), tools for sharing and storing materials (Google Docs), tools for presenting (Knovio, Voicethread), and tools for peer-learning assignments in online courses (jigsaws, robust creative works . . . etc).

The final chapter of the book focuses on how to assess active and experiential learning. The authors outline and discuss selected techniques that can be used to assess student performance in online environments within an LMS and outside of an LMS. The authors emphasize that the assessment should be tied to the learning outcomes, and for the online courses instructors should consider how to capture student learning before, during, and after the online learning experiences. The authors suggest observations, checklists or self-assessments, portfolios, and tests/quizzes as a way to assess active learning. Active learning assessments provide a basis for learners and instructors to reflect and show that learning has taken place. For experiential learning assessments, the authors suggested similar techniques as useful and they added a few more assessment techniques as some of the outcomes of experiential learning might be closely related to occupational outcomes. Thus, authors suggest and explain in detail the following as assessments: oral presentations, internship, role-playing, interviews with experts, and workplace recommendations to use in relation to online experiential learning strategies. The final chapter concludes with a well-organized table that presents tools that are available outside of an LMS (VoiceThread, Qualtrics, Poll Everywhere . . . etc.), how to use these tools as an assessment tool, and the URL addresses to reach the main page of these tools.

Overall, the book provides a practical but brief foundation of experiential and active learning strategies for online learners' engagement, coupled with practical and concrete ideas for implementing these in online courses. Instructors and instructional designers who would like to design engaging and interactive learner experiences in their online courses can use this book as a resource. Concrete examples in each chapter provide guidelines for readers about various strategies for increasing learner engagement, which is supported by technological tool/platform suggestions and resources. Readers who are new to designing engaging online experiences, readers who struggle with engaging their students in online learning environments, or readers who like to include more active and experiential

strategies in online courses will find this book very useful as it provides practical ideas and concrete examples.

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