Assessment Strategies for Online Learning: Engagement and Authenticity, 2018. By Dianne Conrad and Jason Openo, Athabasca University Press, 220 pages.
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Reviewed by Michael Dabrowski

Introduction

We are going through a period that is forcing us to re-evaluate much that we do. This reappraisal is particularly acute in education where the response to COVID-19 has altered the teaching and learning landscape, forcing most institutions online overnight. Given this reality, Dianne Conrad and Jason Openo's book is even more timely and relevant. We may be inclined to overlook the title as another step-by-step guide to evaluating students in their online learning journey. However, if we did so, we would miss out on a valuable, well-researched exploration of assessment approaches, many of which can be applied equally well in multiple delivery formats.

Potential Audience

While recognizing the discipline-specific limitations to exploring alternative forms of assessment, the intention of this book is to reach a broad audience of curriculum developers, educators, course designers and developers, graduate students and scholars in the field of education, and business and industrial trainers. The book is written for those who are engaged in online teaching and learning, but provides ample material for those who have been thrust into the online sphere or who are simply exploring how to work towards a blended learning environment.

Scope of Book

Both Conrad and Openo have dedicated research and teaching activities in the shaping of future online educators. They did, and do so currently, with a keen focus on the assessment process from an institutional, faculty, and student perspective. All the issues that educators and students face in the wake of the pandemic are anticipated, highlighted, and explored in the light of assessment strategies for online learning. In the first part of the book, the authors explore the

philosophical underpinnings of our contemporary learning institutions and the values they hold most sacred. They begin by orienting us in what online learning encompasses and the affordances provided for more engaging and authentic assessment strategies, recognizing that the field is changing at a lightning pace. They trace the evolutionary history of transitioning from distance and adult education to online delivery while exploring the last thirty years of educational theories and their implications for online learning, including the fine line between assessment and evaluation. The authors tease out the many principles that emerged from adult education and trace the historical trajectory of theoretical orientations to teaching and learning. All the while, they encourage the reader to take a philosophical stance highlighting the contribution of distance education approaches, constructivism and connectivism to this discussion and underscoring the importance of reflection in the learning process.

They explore the impact of "the age of open" on higher learning with the shifts to MOOCs, the use of open educational resources, the impact of open access journals, and the trends towards crowdsourcing and social media that are all affecting education. They also highlight the pressure these open trends are placing on traditional evaluation and assessment by challenging the legitimacy of the traditional hierarchical structures. They highlight peer assessment as a formative strategy to create a learning community, enhance engagement, and authenticity. As to the latter, they argue that assessment and evaluation should "offer learners the opportunity to relate their learning to real-life subjects and real-life problems" (p.102), highlighting service-learning and badging as authentic assessment strategies.

Having laid down the foundation of assessment, Conrad and Openo delve into research to construct a framework for an authentic assessment and evaluation strategy for online learning. They challenge the reader through examples and questions designed to prime the reader to apply the principles presented in the book to their environment. Then they explore various technologies to create assessments in online, blended, and flipped format courses with emphasis again on the impact of social media in the educational context. The journey finishes with a brief exploration of the benefits and pitfalls of self-assessment. They conclude with a recipe for authentic assessment practices: "assessment that aims for practicality, real-life application, and meaningfulness; assessment that offers learners a context for their creativity and productivity; and assessment that provides a good base for sustained learning." (p. 160)

As an open online instructor, learning designer, and course developer, I enjoyed reading the book for both the moments of confirmation and inspiration. Particularly valuable was the appendix, which included other educators sharing their insights on authentic assessment from a diverse global perspective. This, and other segments of the book, are well worth the investment of time and reflection.

References

Conrad, D., & Openo, J. (2018). *Assessment strategies for online learning: Engagement and authenticity*. Athabasca University Press. doi:10.15215/aupress/9781771992329.01

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