

Book Review:

The Next Generation of Distance Education: Unconstrained Learning

Moller, L., & Huett, J., (eds.) (In-Press), Springer Publications.

Reviewer: Sonja A. Irlbeck, Capella University

The timing of this book is both propitious and precipitous – Propitious because experts came together in summer 2010 and committed to publishing timely ideas to share. Precipitous in that the ideas are momentous – or as Huett describes in the preface, dikes are straining and about to burst with ideas related to how web-based technologies are revolutionizing learning and reshaping educational processes.

In graduate school, one engages in conversations (virtual and real) about disconnects between what is needed in the real world and what is being taught in learning venues. Disconnects in learning are happening at all levels – business, higher education, distance education, and entrenched local levels. At the same time, elements that inform our instructional design profession are maturing and are available for application and implementation at all levels to help bring *how* people *learn* in line with *how* people are *taught*. Concepts about these next generations of learning and teaching are the focus of this book.

As greater understanding in neuroscience, coupled with technology enabled teaching and learning and the inspiration of the internet become more attainable, the nature of education and training has changed. How do we design effective instruction and harness ideas that begin to foster change and greater learning? This book presents several ideas, such as Hokanson's thoughts related to design review as an important aspect, or ideas from Spector that distance education is becoming commonplace throughout all educational venues and is an experience occurring in a *technology-enabled learning environment* that is no longer two dimensional but multi-dimensional. Technology-enabled learning is at the doorstep of sweeping changes, formats and environments for learning in today's

society.

Cleveland-Innes and Garrison's chapter describes how the teaching and learning emphasis has shifted – from *what* to learn to *how* to learn. Impending and current changes in technology, financial realities, ever more information to be learned and applied, the culture, and the world are examples of factors impacting how education will be 'done' in the future. As one thinks about the *how* of learning, the first chapter (Moller, Robison & Huett) frames the discussion by proposing principles to guide the next generation of learning including "learning experience design" and encouraging us to harness strengths of technology. This book formalizes some of the ideas about how technology helps everyone learn in new ways. Consider a recent study (Landeros, 2011) about creating 'travel apps' for disabled learners when traveling by bus in their communities, enabling greater independence, access to resources, school and jobs.

Chapters in this book provide insight into the future of instructional design, teaching and learning, concluding with a compilation of classic articles about instructional design prior to 1990. While an important foundation for today's thinking, I found myself also wanting recommendations for recent writings (within the last ten years) that help inform ideas shared in the book.

I for one am ready for the renaissance that Huett claims is about to happen. The challenge may be in finding leaders brave enough to allow the dam to flow with inspired thinking to begin shaping education for the future that is here today. This book can help shape thinking and prepare for changes that are knocking at our professional doorsteps.