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BOOK REVIEWS

E-connecting with e-learning series: the power of role-based e-learning, edited by Sandra Wills, Elyssebeth Leigh, Albert Ip, Allison Littlejohn and Chris Pegler, New York and London, Routledge, 2011, £24.99, 257 pp., ISBN 13: 978-0-415-87785-5 (paperback)

Wills et al. set out to provide a literary contribution for academics who wish to engage students in e-learning opportunities set in pseudo real situations. They encourage the use of collaboration and communication, within this context, which is most laudable and refreshing.

The main strength of this book lies in its usefulness as a practical guide to role-play. It is built on an impressive collection of examples of the use of role-based e-learning by educators from across the globe. Although the title and the stated objectives stress e-learning and online activity, the authors, quite rightly, place much more emphasis on the roles, the interactions and the learning than they do on the software that is being used to support the activities.

The authors begin by giving due consideration to the definition of their terms and the scoping of their topic and they present a large number of examples within this scope. These examples are introduced (and then considered individually in some detail) in chapters 1 and 2. This section of the book is extremely useful to those who are looking around for inspiration, or hoping to find a role-play that they can adopt or adapt for their own use. The examples of existing role-based e-learning in chapter 1 provide both interest and variety, enlightening and giving confidence to academics new to the field of e-learning. Although every one of the examples is drawn from the e-learning domain, many of the examples considered in this section could also be used effectively without the need for computers. The book is perhaps not offering any startling revelations about the use of e-learning in education but it does offer those educators, who are at the beginning of the process, the opportunity to gather information and examples from one text efficiently and effectively. If for no other reason this book should be an inclusion in the libraries of institutions that value the development of quality learning and teaching within their academic staffs.

Overall the Introduction lays out the scene very well for continuing discussions within the following chapters. There is a question regarding the claim in the introduction that the phrase 'role-based e-learning' (1) is used for the first time in this publication as it appears to have been previously used by others. A minor point perhaps but worth considering. The diagram at Figure 0.3 (5) is unhelpful. It does not add clarity to what has already been explained in the text regarding the perceived dimensions of the learning design and where the different technologies might sit in relation to the design.

Chapter 1 clearly presents the educational theory that supports and underpins research and development within the area of e-learning. The terminology is clear and unambiguous with good explanations of the differing terms that allude to the same types of learning activities, drawing it all together for the reader. Wills et al. continue to detail the variety of opportunities and their uses in Chapter 2 enhancing the detail and fleshing out the content.

The authors begin now to introduce the farther reaching concepts that are of particular interest to the more advanced research areas such as the transfer of knowledge gained in immersive role-based e-learning into real life situations; 'SIMPLE embodies the concept of transactional learning (46).

By far the most useful parts of this text are those devoted to designing the online immersive learning opportunities. The key factors to the success of an immersive e-learning task sit firmly in the acknowledgement of the learning objectives and the learner experience as fundamental to the design. This is no different to achieving a good quality learning delivery that is classroom based. Wills et al. take the reader through the stages and reasoning for the design step by step with impeccable clarity. The diagrams and tables serve to support the explanatory text positively, providing a sense that the desired end result is more than achievable for even a novice.

Table 6.1 (133) is particularly helpful in identifying the difference between the role as a tutor and the role as a moderator within an immersive role-based e-learning environment. The differentiation is an important one to ensure that student collaboration is not impacted or influenced but simply facilitated.

Part of the consideration for the design of the role-based e-learning activity lies with the selection of the medium or platform to be used. Wills et al. provide an interesting discussion which draws on the work of other researchers to offer guidance to the reader (159–64).

Chapters 3 to 8 deal with the design of role-plays in detail. This section of the book is more useful to those who are considering developing new role-plays. While it is slightly more theoretical than the previous section, it is still driven forward by the examples. As with chapter 2, each example is described in detail. Chapter 6 from this section takes the form of a lengthy discussion of how the moderator contributes to successful role-play. Again, while the examples chosen are clearly examples of e-learning, most of the discussion is generally applicable to all forms of role-play. Chapter 7 deals with the platforms that can be used to support role-play. While this is the most specifically e-learning chapter, even here much of the discussion could equally apply to any form of role-play. This approach seems right elsewhere in the book, but perhaps this chapter (and later 10) could have gone further to consider the platforms in more detail. Chapter 8 considers how assessment can be built into role-play. Here the authors spend some time asking questions such as 'what is assessment?' and 'why assess at all?' and giving answers that might be equally applicable to any learning.

Chapter 9 is a brief consideration of how the effectiveness of role-plays can be evaluated. This leads into a discussion of role-based e-learning as a research topic, which in turn leads us to chapter 10, where the authors speculate on the future of role-based e-learning. As part of this, the authors conclude that the 'evolution of role-based e-learning will revolve around three factors – technology, educators and learners' (30). The book deals well with how learners and educators can use role-play as an active learning strategy but, despite the extensive use of e-learning examples, perhaps it could have dealt better with the technology. Throughout the book the authors point to asynchronous group work, groups working at a distance and (to a lesser extent) anonymity, as the key advantages of using computers to facilitate role-play. It seems to us that they slightly overlook the computer as an actor in the role-play. Some of their examples (e.g., business games) have a very important role for the computer that is somewhat underplayed. From the science and engineering perspective we believe that the authors also skip over a whole field of technology simulations; admittedly the way in which these are often used emphasises the interaction between an individual student and the technology, but they can also be the basis of very effective role-plays.

The addition of Appendix B, 'Chapter reflections and review', on page 233 is very useful. The inspiring points are there in bite size pieces to refer back to at any point. This draws the reader back to revisit parts of the publication that become more pertinent as they progress through the creative and development process of their own role-based e-learning projects.

It is our opinion that Wills et al. have accomplished that which they set out to do. Wills et al. have produced a text that meets both the needs and the expectations of academics seeking to understand and engage with the exciting arena of role-based e-learning, using a practical, no nonsense approach. The text is accessible and the tables and diagrams are well placed and informative throughout.

The book is packed with useful tables drawing comparisons between the many examples. The appendices are also useful, especially the list of contacts for each example, but also the notes and reflections.

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Trust in education: truths and values, edited by Jerome Satterthwaite, Heather Piper, Pat Sikes and Simon Webster, Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books, 2011, £20.99, 170 pp., ISBN 978-1-85856-488-3

In the first of her 2002 Reith lectures, *A question of trust*, Onora O'Neill said:

> It isn't only rulers and governments who prize and need trust. Each of us and every profession and every institution needs trust. We need it because we have to be able to rely on others acting as they say that they will, and because we need others to accept that we will act as we say we will. The sociologist Niklas Luhman was right that 'A complete absence of trust would prevent [one] even getting up in the morning'. (O'Neill 2002, Lecture 1: *Spreading suspicion*, 3–4)

As I read *Trust in education: Truths and values*, the fundamental importance of trust in every aspect of education was demonstrated from a range of theoretical and practical perspectives. The tone, structure and content of the chapters are extremely varied, but their common denominator is that each writer is engaging in thought-provoking and challenging ways with the themes of discourse, power and resistance which form the title of the series of which this book is volume eight. It is divided into two parts. In the four chapters of part 1, the epistemological reasons for the perceived current loss of trust in contemporary culture and education are examined. In the four chapters of part 2, the difficult and sometimes seemingly intractable problems of providing a dependable and trustworthy education fit for contemporary needs are addressed.

One of the book's strengths is the diversity of authorial voices to be heard within its pages: not only will these voices appeal to different audiences, but they also elicit different forms of reading. The editors' forewarning, through Walt Whitman's words, that 'the process of reading is not a half-sleep, but... a gymnast's struggle' (ix) provided me with a helpful