

Using Learning Technologies (International Perspectives On Practice)

**Burge, Elizabeth J. and Haughey, Margaret (2001),
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This book is edited by Dr. Elizabeth J. Burge and Dr. Margaret Haughey who are the academics from Canada studying on distance education for many years. The contributors of the book are from eight different countries. These contributors are experienced on various theoretical and practical aspects of distance education.

There are 14 papers which are classified in four major parts including the introduction. As the first major part is introduction, the second major part entitled as "policy issues", third major part entitled as "practice issues" and finally in the fourth part the "quality issues" are discussed.

In general, this book can be considered as a collection of "first-hand accounts" from experienced and accomplished learning technology practitioners highlighting issues in using learning technologies for especially flexible, distance and open learning.

The first part of the book is also an introduction written by one of the editors of the book, Margaret Haughey, and brings up the general and basic concepts of using learning technologies. Dr. Haugney tries to answer some questions to explain the related concepts. The article begins with the question "what the learning technologies are" and "why learning technologies important in education and so on". After this author introduces to readers the outline of this book by explaining the aim and content of every major part.

In the second major part named as "policy issues", policy development and policy implementation issues related to learning technologies are discussed in four papers. The papers are on issues in the developing world and policy formation and policy implementation in specific institutions.

The paper written by Barbara Sponk entitled as "Naming the learning technology issues in developing countries" introduces fundamental issues related to learning technologies faced by women in the developing countries and gives us statistical information and vignettes to focus our awareness.

The following paper is written by Judith M. Roberts, Eric M. Keough and Lucille Pacey: "Public and institutional policy interplay: Canadian example". This paper is attracting our attention on the importance of understanding and using government and institutional policy in support of flexible learning and distance education. This paper is explains the need for educators to be aware of the policy process, try to monitor it, to know how to get involved and to be obvious and clear about the outcomes they are looking for distance education. The authors of the paper use two Canadian cases to point out the key areas involved at government and institutional level. The paper end with a list of recommendations about the need to be policy-informed, to analyze key policy drivers etc. which seems to be interesting and useful.

The third paper "Getting the systems right: Experience at the University of the West Indies" is written by Christine Marret and Claudia Harvey. The authors provide a

longitudinal look (1978-2000) at the problems and creativity of the University of West Indies (UWI) in implementing distance education in response and stakeholder demands. They outline the steps adopted and the challenges they are still working through and provide a set of recommendations. Over the period, they describe the use of different technologies and the move from being a pilot project, an experiment, to be an enterprise. They also point out one common problem which is upgrading technology remained ubiquitous.

The paper "Developing course materials: A context of technology constraints" written by Judith W. Kamau is the last paper of this part. The author of this paper describes the constraints on course development, on the selection and the use appropriate learning technologies and on learner support in her experience in Kenya and Botswana. Judith W. Kamau outlines the course development model in use at the University of Botswana and explains and discusses the major problems on such a model from political announcements, lack of lead time and inadequate integration of the unit and the dual-model institution. Consequently, the author points out the importance of regular monitoring to ensure quality throughout the system.

The third major part of the book is on the "practice issues" which are analysed by five papers. The authors of the papers of this part "use their own experience as teachers and student support facilitators to explore their ambivalent and sometimes conflicting reactions toward electronic communications technologies" as it is pointed out in the book. Issues such as interaction, autonomy and access are predominant in their discussions of the cyberclassroom.

"Lessons from our cyberclassroom" is the first paper of this part. The authors of the paper are Catherine Cavanaugh, Evelyn Ellerman, Lori Oddson and Arlene Young from Athabasca University, Canada. The authors are on the opinion that relationships and personal interactions are integral to learning and teaching and discuss lessons they have learned "from the cyberclassroom", in particular the pushes and pulls associated with the adoption of new learning technologies. Their concerns include misgivings about becoming facilitators rather than teachers and of being overwhelmed by e-mails. They end their arguments with useful recommendations for institutions, instructors, teachers, tutors and for students. Here they stress one main point that they support a collaborative model where students and instructors produce knowledge and seek change interactively and democratically.

Next paper of this part has a topic as "Teacher or avatar? Identity issues in computer-mediated contexts" and is written by Gill Kirkup who is a senior lecturer in educational technology in the Institute for Educational Technology (IET) at the Open University, UK. In this paper, Gill Kirkup addresses assumptions about situatedness, identity, authenticity and embodiment in the on-line environment. Moving from recollections about the experiences of summer residential schools at the Open University, she uses the provision of a photograph on an online course to question her own online identity as the teacher. Doing this Gill Kirkup wonders if her identity is dependent on students knowing what she looks like and on knowing her gender and how their conceptions of her affect their learning and her relationship with them. Kirkup calls and points out the importance for more research on the development of identities in online learning communities and how as educators we can help people connect these to their embodied keyboarding selves with some questions at the end of the paper.

Suzanne Sexty's paper in this part is entitled "Web-based research assistance". It is generally known that condition of library support services is really a difficult problem in distance education. Sexty, describes her challenges in designing an interactive Web site to provide research assistance and teach information literacy. She worked with librarians at other Canadian universities in the region to develop a site that all could access. In the process, she worked not only to develop the necessary skills to put up a Web page with

hypertext, but also to ensure that there would be sufficient users to make her work and the time invested worthwhile. assignment requirements that involved library research skills with instructors and once the site was operational, developed a business plan to ensure its continued viability.

"No one will listen to us: Rural Fulbe women learning by radio in Nigeria" is the fourth paper in this part written by Lantana Usman who is a professor at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria. Lantana Usman explores the possibilities and constraints on the use of radio programs for adult learning. Usman begins with a review of involvement of nomadic women in the educational radio programs designed for the Fulani of Northern Nigeria. Lantana Usman identifies the importance of the radio as a communication medium and device for these women, but also highlighting that the women are dependent on their men for access to the radio. In the paper it is suggested that in terms of policy development, the women's organizations should be consulted regularly; that more attention should be given to the women's lifestyles in the broadcast scheduling; that the pedagogy and content should be changed to be more interactive, responsive and culturally appropriate.

The last paper of this part is "Confronting barriers to distance study in Tanzania" by Edith Mhehe from Open University of Tanzania. In this paper Edith Mhehe examines the reasons for the low rate of participation of women in the Open University of Tanzania. She describes the results of interviewing over 80 women: students, former students and non-students. It is found that three barriers affected women participation which are lack of time and resources, cultural expectations and financial issues. Given their other responsibilities women students are in short of sufficient time to focus on their studies. In addition to this the delays in obtaining study materials exacerbated this problem. Edith Mhehe suggests that reviewing the present instructional system, providing more self-contained materials, ensuring the provision of bursaries of fee-release, increasing gender-sensitive staff development and involving more women in the administration of the Open University of Tanzania are immediate steps that could aid women's participation.

"Quality issues" is the fourth major part of this book. First three papers in this part are concerned with the evaluation of the design and implementation of courses and programs to provide information for policy-making.

The first paper of this part is "Reflections on evaluation online learning and teaching" written by Charlotte N. Gunawardena who is a professor at the University of New Mexico. The first focus of the paper is on participation and Charlotte N. Gunawardena used interactional analysis to diagram the linkages among participants in a peer support network of medical students. The particular model used is able to identify numbers of interactions but lack a way to analyze the messages themselves.

The next paper of this part is written by Mary Thorpe and named as "Evaluating the use of learning technologies." Mary Thorpe reviews the current situation of evaluation in relation to learning technologies. Based on her experience as an evaluator and director of an institutional evaluation unit at the Open University, Thorpe identifies the key issues facing evaluators as access and learner profiling, usability, the changing roles of learners and tutors and new opportunities created by learning technologies. Strategies for gathering data have also changed. It is getting easier to reach students and responses can be designed to be sent electronically and privately. Online interviews and a full course transcript are other means to gather qualitative data effectively.

Christine von Prümmer and Ute Rossié who are working as institutional researchers at the German Distance University wrote the third paper of this part named as "Gender-sensitive evaluation research". They undertake institutional studies and critique findings to ensure that gender bias or gender blindness is revealed and addressed. Christine von Prümmer and Ute Rossié document a list of gender-related concerns for feminist researchers. These include the proportion of male and female registrants, gender specific enrollment patterns

and course choices, differences in learning styles, gendered learning contexts and gender differences related to use of electronic communications technologies. Finally, they contend that gender-sensitive research is crucial, because without it the natural development of virtual universities is likely to copy the gender biases present in traditional forms of distance learning.

The last paper of this part and the book is "Using learning technologies: A synthesis of challenges and guidelines", written by Elizabeth J. Burke. In this paper the author draws from her own experience and her readings of the papers of the book provide a reflection on the major themes in the book and a set of guidelines for practice.

In general this book is interesting and useful for the people who is working and studying in the field of learning technologies. Drawing on their own experience, the authors of the papers identify and explore the most practical and complex issues faced and reflect upon the lessons learned. Since the authors are from eight different countries, experiences from eight different countries are presented in the areas of policy development, teaching skills, learner guidance, evaluation and reflective practice. This book must be emphasized since it draws attraction to gender issues related to distance education practices.

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