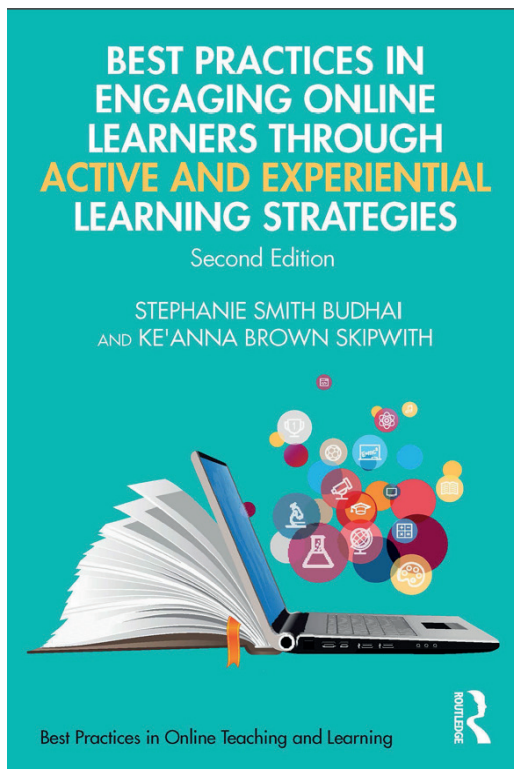# BOOK REVIEW

BEST PRACTICES IN ENGAGING ONLINE LEARNER THROUGH ACTIVE AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING STRATEGIES
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INTRODUCTION

In response to the increasing importance of online learning, Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies by Stephanie Smith Budhai and Ke'Anna Brown Skipwith presents a vital blueprint for creating interactive and engaging online education. The book is designed for educators, instructional designers, and administrators, offering practical techniques to transform virtual classrooms into immersive learning environments through active and experiential approaches (Budhai & Skipwith, 2022). Budhai and Skipwith deliver a wealth of strategies that promote deeper engagement, meaningful interaction, and real-world application. This review synthesizes the book's main insights from each chapter and connects them to current educational research supporting the value of active learning.

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

In Chapter 1, Budhai and Skipwith investigate the constraints of regular online discussion forums and urge teachers to include various engagement methods. They believe that focusing solely on traditional discussion boards limits active participation and critical thinking, which are crucial to the learning process. To address this, the authors recommend numerous engagement strategies that encourage synchronous and asynchronous participation. Drawing on key ideas such as Kolb's experiential learning model (1984) and Dewey's active learning principles (1938), Budhai and Skipwith advocate for integrating active learning technology that allows students to interact directly with course content and with one another. Studies indicate that interactive techniques, such as organized peer discussions, collaborative projects, and feedback-driven activities, significantly boost online learning outcomes and encourage critical engagement (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). By putting these activities within a solid theoretical framework, this chapter sets up the environment for a modern approach to online education.

Chapter 2 highlights the significance of developing real-world interactions in virtual learning settings through field-based tasks, service learning, and simulations. Budhai and Skipwith highlight how these experiential approaches, particularly simulations, may integrate real-world context into online courses, allowing students to engage in hands-on experience in disciplines like healthcare, social work, and education. The chapter examines numerous methods for integrating experiential learning, from virtual simulations that imitate real-life events to service-learning activities that combine coursework with community participation. Research corroborates these techniques, as studies indicate that experiential learning boosts student confidence, enhances engagement, and creates practical abilities that students can employ in their future careers (Cook et al., 2011; Foronda et al., 2020). By investigating these strategies, Budhai and Skipwith suggest that experience learning may make online education more relevant, engaging, and effective.

Chapter 3 discusses project-based and scenario-based learning (PBL and SBL) as effective strategies for constructing active involvement and critical thinking. The authors discuss how technologies such as virtual laboratories, artificial intelligence (AI), and augmented reality (AR) may build immersive and engaging learning environments. Budhai and Skipwith give practical techniques for implementing PBL and SBL in numerous fields, highlighting how these tools enable students to address real-world issues cooperatively and independently. Research supports the educational usefulness of these technologies, demonstrating that virtual laboratories, AI, and AR can increase engagement and enhance retention by allowing students opportunities to interact with course content in creative ways (Zhang et al., 2022). By concentrating on these sophisticated technologies, Budhai and Skipwith present a forward-looking perspective on how instructors may harness modern technology to encourage critical thinking and problem-solving competencies.

In Chapter 4, Budhai and Skipwith examine the roles of gamification and social media in promoting online learning. They claim that gamified aspects, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, can considerably improve student motivation, while social media encourages informal peer engagement and connection. The authors provide suggestions for incorporating these technologies into online courses, noting that gamification may boost motivation by rewarding accomplishment and that social media promotes collaborative learning by imitating the informal interactions of traditional classrooms. This approach is in line with recent studies, which show that gamification might boost student engagement and academic achievement by motivating learners to actively participate in course activities (Landers et al., 2015). Furthermore, research suggests that social media promotes social presence in online education, allowing students to connect outside of planned coursework and building a sense of belonging (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). This section gives excellent ideas on how teachers might use these digital technologies to create community and connection in virtual classrooms.

Chapter 5 focuses on developing a social presence in online education through interactive and peer-learning options. Budhai and Skipwith stress that creating a social presence is crucial for decreasing isolation and improving student satisfaction. The authors suggest solutions include collaborative group projects, online study groups, and scheduled peer feedback activities that assist students build relationships with their peers. They argue that peer participation fosters a sense of community and accountability, which are critical for online student success. Studies confirm this assumption, with studies proving that social presence is positively associated with satisfaction with learning, engagement, and retention in online contexts (Ensmann et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2017). The chapter gives a thorough framework for developing social presence, showing that well-designed participatory activities may successfully replicate the peer interaction that occurs in traditional classrooms, thus making online learning more supportive and integrated.

In the concluding Chapter 6, Budhai and Skipwith address assessment practices for evaluating active and experiential learning, presenting both formative and summative approaches. They advocate for reflective practices and clear rubrics as essential tools for assessing student progress in experiential contexts. Budhai and Skipwith argue that effective assessment not only validates learning outcomes but also encourages students to reflect on their experiences, enhancing the depth of their learning. Current literature on online assessment supports these approaches, as formative assessments—like reflective journaling and self-assessment—are shown to facilitate student engagement, self-awareness, and understanding of learning objectives (Czerkawski, 2019). Additionally, rubrics give clarity and direction, ensuring that students understand the criteria by which they are evaluated. This covers essential techniques for analyzing the impact of active learning practices, allowing teachers practical resources to monitor and encourage student performance in online contexts.

CONCLUSION

Stephanie Smith Budhai and Ke'Anna Brown Skipwith's Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies is a comprehensive and practical guide for enhancing student engagement and interactivity in online courses. The book integrates current educational theories with research-backed techniques, making it an invaluable resource for educators and course designers. While it could address additional logistical challenges for asynchronous settings, the text presents robust frameworks and strategies that empower educators to create meaningful, dynamic, and impactful online learning experiences.

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