

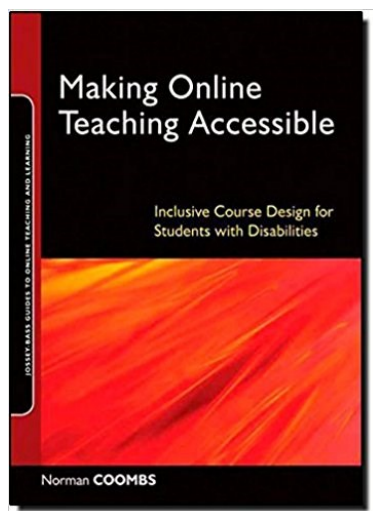
BOOK REVIEW

MAKING ONLINE TEACHING ACCESSIBLE: INCLUSIVE COURSE DESIGN FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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ISBN	978-0-470-49904-7
Publication Date	2010
Publication Formats	Hardcover and e-Book (PDF)
Publisher	John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in information and communication technologies has led to the explosion of online learning. In addition, with the improvement in assistive technologies, people with disabilities have the chance to access to information and learning, which is incomparable to the former times. Assistive technologies are specialized software and hardware, which include screen readers, screen magnification, voice recognition and Braille keyboards. As a result, education has become much more egalitarian and inclusive. Norman Coombs provides a wonderful catalogue of means, tools, guidelines, decisions and legislations towards a more equitable as well as more inclusive design of

courses in so far as online education is concerned. According to Coombs, accessibility means the online course contents can be used effectively by disabled learners. Coombs indicates that the book is intended for the teachers and instructional design staff.

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

In chapter 1, Coombs holds that the emergence of information technology has changed the education process for everyone, and, it has changed the personal lives of a lot of people. Coombs states that this is even truer when it comes to disabled people, namely, blind people and hearing disabled people. Digitized information has been major breakthrough for the disadvantaged. Coombs in this chapter also provides a detailed account of the assistive technologies, such as audio and video captions, voice recognition and screen reader; ways of inclusive design such as universal design principles for learning;

legislations such as section 504 and 508 of 1973, as well as ADA in 1990; and finally guidelines like web content accessibility guidelines.

Coombs, in chapter 2, goes over the three components of an accessible online learning system. These three components are learning systems such as LMSes accessible course content such as in the form of html, and learner's capability, which is student readiness.

In chapter 3, the author explains how to make accessible contents by virtue of Microsoft Word and Excel. Here Coombs suggests that using style sheets and word styling feature as well as universal design principles make the difference. Headings should be short and prominent. Lines should be short and coherent. Tables should be simple and intuitive.

Coombs discusses the properties of an accessible power point document in chapter 4. According to Coombs, the principles of universal design here apply also. Presentations should be structured thoughtfully. Contrasting foreground and background colors should be selected. Content should be kept easy to read. The use of text boxes should be avoided. A transcript of the narration should be provided for the hearing disabled people.

Coombs in the following chapter, which is chapter 5, goes onto further details of how accessible contents can be distributed through various versions. Coombs offers power point formats, (ppt and pptx), plus daisy as well as hard copy Braille versions in addition to word, pdf and html versions.

In chapter 6, Coombs takes up the math and graphics in terms of accessibility. Coombs highlights that math and graphics have been the greatest challenge to visually-impaired people concerning accessibility. In spite of the revolutionary achievements, came with the discovery of nemeth code, mathml, math type, and math speak, we can say that even though it is much easier relative to the past now, the greatest challenge to the blind people, is still emanating from the graphical stem areas. Digital revolution still keeps us hopeful.

In chapter 7, Coombs delves into the use of multimedia in an accessible manner. Coombs offers two applications, which are Magpie and Camtasia for producing video captions. According to Coombs, even though it takes more time, the value, multimedia adds up to an online course is worthwhile. In using multimedia, Coombs determines the following steps as follows: It must be kept simple. It must be kept short. And lastly, it must be kept relevant.

Finally, Coombs in chapter 8 offers the formation of an accessibility team in an educational institution. He also describes the necessary qualities of the members of such team. The stakeholders' representatives must be the members. Unlike many prejudices and discussions, Coombs argues that online learning is both a challenge and an exciting opportunity for the disabled learners. Given that the learner readiness and other kinds of digital divide are overcome; online teaching is a wonderful system of education. Accessibility of an online course depends on the accessibility of the learning management system, accessible course content, high quality adaptive technology and on the disabled

student's readiness. The application of the universal design principles, Coombs states, creates reasonable accessibility.

All in all, despite some confusion of chapter titles and symbols used thereof, this book provides an excellent example of instructional design, whose main ideal is inclusiveness. Being blind and an educator, Professor Norman Coombs shares his priceless experience and knowledge with us. To finalize, as he puts it, teachers must focus on the ability of every disabled student instead of their disabilities.

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Suleyman ARI is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Distance Education at Anadolu University. He has gained his undergraduate degree in International Relations from Bilkent University. He has gained his Masters Degree in Political Science from the University of California at Los Angeles. His current interests focus on accessibility, assistive technologies, universal design, inclusive design, learning environments and disability rights.

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