Online Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Shirley Bach, Philip Haynes, Jennifer Lewis-Smith. Berkshire: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, 2007. 209 pp. $ 129.31

"Online learning and teaching in higher education" provides a very interesting overview of theory and practice in online learning and teaching for higher education. In fact, authors focus on how technology can be applied to learning and what is the role of online learning in higher education policy and practice.

Bach, Haynes and Lewis-Smith outline three main objectives:

a)   Review of several learning theories and their current impact on the use of online learning in higher education

b)   Collect case studies and practice examples that help reflect on works carried out and which are the key factors to be considered in the everyday routine of current higher education.

c)   Assess the role of networking technologies in the development of learning theories

The aim of the book is very ambitious and the outcome is, undoubtedly, very interesting. Effectively, it could be attractive to people from a wide range of scopes: university managers who are planning to introduce ICT in their institution, academic staff who want to see the educational reasons for ICT use and need assistance to develop their new ideas and, in addition, people who are just starting a research activity on ICT and education. Without a doubt, the list of references in the text is very extensive and their interest is great for all people belonging to the above-mentioned groups.

First of all the book examines the presence of the Internet and World Wide Web on all aspects of human activity, particularly the social and education systems. Authors point out challenges, milestones and some achievements in higher education. After that, they give some advice to institutions and academic staff on the introduction of online learning in their everyday life. In addition, they deal with several aspects of online learning design taking into account that it is integrated in a wider teaching-learning process. Last but not least, authors present the experience from one of them in order to give a more detailed analysis and synthesis of how learning methods can be applied to online learning.

In this review, I focus on three aspects tackled by the authors: 1) consequences of ICT use, particularly, online learning in Higher Education, 2) the term "andragogy" to describe learning and teaching processes related to adults, 3) specific proposals according the subject characteristics.

A very interesting aspect treated by authors is the influence of online learning in traditional forms of teaching used in higher education: from working in small groups and tutorial support to constructivist learning with action learning, problem-based learning and work-based learning. Furthermore, these technologies, viewed as a means that facilitates communication and access to information, oblige academic staff and people related to the world of education in general, to rethink their strategies and actions: from the strategic plans of management teams to the teaching activity of academic staff, including processes of managing administrative personnel. Authors do not make an in-depth analysis of these transformations: conceptualisation, design and implementation of

processes and political, teaching and administrative effects. Nevertheless they introduce four interesting topics: growth in Higher Education to provide mass HE, fast technological changes, IT skills of students and academic staff, change in students' lifestyles and the international HE market. All of them are in themselves a "major theme" that could be the objective of an essay. Thus, we can say that the wide-ranging approach of the book produces a very interesting debate on the many themes that it involves and the volume of cited references but not a very in-depth of the issues tackled.

Bach et al. point out an important aspect to take into account when we design online learning experiences in HE: specific characteristics of learning process related to adults. They cite Knowles and his term "Andragogy" to introduce it and talk about role of tutors in this process. They agree that relationship between tutor and student is based on collaboration and construction of knowledge, thus they hold the opinion that their "new role" has to be supported through professional development time for tutors and a policy for online learning based on educational values and research. Once more, they do not develop this idea in depth. They do not distinguish clearly between the several kinds and levels of online learning or how students profile determine characteristics of educational strategy. In fact it is a problem that exists in all of the chapters: they propose a set of guidelines to planning a process of learning, designing the learning experience and structuring the environment and creating learning spaces without referring to way of online learning to be used.

They assert that the teaching methods are often varied, can depend upon the nature of the students we are teaching or relate to the subjects we teach, and are often supported by a

philosophical attempt that influences the whole curriculum. When they talk about teaching materials they point out the convenience of placing the learning within its context, considering the needs of the learner and designing suitable related tasks. They give some guidelines to design learning activities according to a learning outcome as well as specific evaluation methods for online learning. In this sense it is evident that the three authors of this book have a lot of experience in experimentation and implementation of a pragmatic approach to online learning. Despite showing some examples to shed light on these questions, they don't focus (because that is not one of the aims of the book) on effective and suitable methods for certain subject areas, consequently, the book is not a hands-on manual of examples of "how to do it". Thus readers can only have some general guidelines to define their learning and teaching proposal which must be adapted to the concrete subject.

Bach et al. finish their essay with a Conclusion chapter where they enumerate benefits and deficiencies, strengths and weakness of online learning and discuss several myths regarding it. For example, they talk about the reduction in face-to-face contact between students and academics, plagiarism without a proper citation, higher education as a short-time business-oriented model or the cheapness aspect and the low-quality of these kinds of experiences. In this sense they argue that universities might see online learning as a strategy to improve the educational quality and, more generally, "modernize" their vision, mission and values. When they notice the benefits of online learning they indicate advantages of online technology in several aspects: access to different social groups, student autonomy, gain in technological and online skills, better quality of study

materials, use of formative assessment tools and integrated summative assessment methods. Moreover, with online learning, some new and exciting challenges come about for higher education and a critical reflection about how knowledge can contribute to have a better and more productive world.

In a nutshell, authors allow us to understand the risks and opportunities in the implementation of online learning in Higher Education from several perspectives, give arguments to university managers to define strategic plans taking into account online technology and encourage academic staff to rethink and redesign their educational proposals using online learning.

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