Interactions in Online Education

Subject area
General

Description
A collection of papers covering a broad spectrum of material within the realm of on-line learning. The text as a whole should be of value to anyone designing, using or managing on-line or flexible learning systems

Authors
Edited by Charles Juwah, (19 individual contributors)

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Undergraduate, research, teachers

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Gren Ireson,
Nottingham Trent University,
Clifton Campus,
Clifton,
Nottingham,
NG11 8NS
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Firstly I must confess that as a user rather than a researcher of on-line pedagogical tools I found this book hard work and in some places too much additional work would have been needed to do full justice to the material. However, that said, the editor must be congratulated on pulling together work across the whole spectrum of on-line education.

Summary Review	
range: * poor to ***** good	
Academic content	*****
Usefulness to student	****
Usefulness to teacher	****
Meets objectives	****
Accuracy	n/a

The text itself is split into four main sections: theoretical and pedagogical perspectives; design and learning environment; practice and professional development. In all these four sections run to 13 *chapters* plus a conclusion by the editor. The *chapters,* however, are more in the style of individual papers which gives the book more of a conference proceeding feel.

The first section develops the theoretical background stressing the importance of interactivity and engagement in the learning process. Working through the three chapters in this first section the reader is moved from a Kolb[1] style experiential learning setting through person-computer interaction to the thesis that current taxonomies of learning are not adequate to cope with the complexity of e-learning. The final chapter in this section sets out a three stage system for classifying e-learning interactivity and its impact on learning.

The second section, of four chapters, explores the design of the e-learning environment. The first chapter develops the notion of using *dialogue games* as a means of creating an engaging learning environment. Using Wittgenstein[2] as a starting point and using the software package *InterLoc* as an exemplar for a mediated educational dialogue package made this chapter particularly difficult for this reviewer. The remaining chapters in this section look at modelling authentic activities in on-line learning, the development and use of learning objects and the use of simulations for discovery type learning and the development of, without specifically referring to, higher order cognitive skills. This final chapter of the section also develops the *PI theory for learning environments* this may be known to the readers but was something else new to this reviewer. PI or parallel instruction was developed by the author of this chapter, Rik Min, and he is cited in almost half the references at the end of the chapter. However, as a newcomer to PI, I'm not fully informed by this chapter and more work would need to be done in order to fully comment on its applicability here.

With section three, of four chapters, I felt I was on safer ground. The section deals very well with the ideas of on-line discussion, peer learning and videoconferencing. The final chapter in this section may prove to be of particular interest to readers as it presents the pedagogic model developed for the University of the Highlands and Islands giving a clear pedagogic model for blended learning. The on-line, face-to-face, videoconferencing mix is, I am sure, an area many of us will be exploring through either interest or need in the near future.

Interactions in Online Education
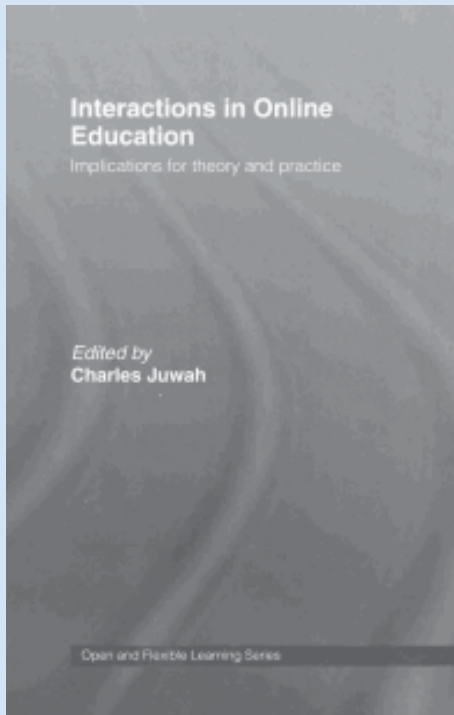
From the publisher...

Interactions in Online Education: Implications for Theory and Practice
By Charles Juwah

Interactivity is at the very heart of learning and is evident at all levels of engagement, whether between fellow students, students and tutors, online learning materials or interfacing with the learning environment. Covering both theory and the practical implications of the issues discussed, this book provides international perspectives on key topics including: analysing and designing e-learning interactions, social and conceptual dimensions of learning, interactions in online discussions, interactions in peer learning and professional development of online facilitators.
It is essential reading for all those involved in the design, implementation, management and use of open and flexible learning.

0-415-35741-1   272pp   2006   £80.00

The final section runs to just two chapters which explore the role of on-line facilitators and their professional development needs.

Having worked through the whole text I am now far more aware of my own developmental needs in terms of on-line or e-learning. Many reading this text may, like myself, be in the state of not knowing what I don't know. This in itself is, I would argue, good for all of us as educators.

The final chapter of the text, conclusion, written by the editor attempts to summarise the thirteen previous chapters. The conclusion looks at the *key issues, design of the learning environment, peer learning* and *professional development.*

Taken as a whole this text would have something for everyone, staff and student alike, but it is more something to be dipped into rather than read through and don't expect an easy read!

References
1. Kolb, D A *Experiential learning: Experience as a Source of learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall (1984).

2. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical investigations,* Oxford, Blackwell (1953).