



Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies

Budhai, Stephanie Smith, and Skipwith, Ke'Anna
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017

Book Review

Tags: experiential learning | online learning | teaching online

Reviewed by: Ryan Korstange, *Middle Tennessee State University*

Date Reviewed: March 29, 2017

“Learning in the 21st century has drastically changed how learners access and process information” (1). The authors of *Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners* begin by describing specific changes in higher education that directly impact student learning. This change is obvious. Several technologies are changing the landscape of higher education: electronic textbooks, learning management systems, large-scale institutional data, social media – each of these changes impacts student experience, and benefit from intentional pedagogical usage. These changes are more thorough in distance learning than in face-to-face contexts it seems. The authors present an idealistic call towards engaging and developing rigorous online education that harnesses its possibilities. As such, they advocate active and experiential learning that is high on transfer and reflection.

To a certain extent, this book seems to be incorrectly titled. Calling itself *Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners* leaves the reader with the expectation that the book contains examples of best practices. What the book does in actuality is to categorize several trends in pedagogy and in the scholarship of teaching and learning research. The focus is almost entirely theoretical. The book surveys experiential learning (13-33), project-based learning (36-39), scenario-based learning (39-43), gamification (47-57), cooperative learning (61-71), and assessment strategies (73-89). The summaries of these areas of pedagogy research are accurate and centralize much of the current research, but the most essential questions remain: how does an instructor take the content they need to present and make it engaging for students? How do instructors engage students in the learning process? What specific strategies empower students to have a higher degree of retention and transportability of what

they have learned? On these questions, theory only gets us so far.

Having said this, the volume has some utility, particularly in that it provides an efficient summary of various mainline innovations in pedagogy research. For this reason, it would be valuable for an instructor new to teaching, or one looking to start making progress towards learning-centered instruction. It also might be worth discussing in a faculty learning community - provided that more seasoned instructors can flesh out the theory with examples from their teaching. The utility of this volume dramatically decreases for the seasoned teacher who has done reading or research into effective teaching practices.

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