

## Resources

---

# ***Technology Resources for Adult Education***

**G. Andrew Page**

The resources in this issue range from a critique of traditional textbooks on designing and developing online courses to an assessment of free, public domain Web 2.0 tools that have the potential for organizing research citations and an instrument for building an online community of learners. As e-learning continues to grow, these resources can help with the quality of design so that learners can effectively interact with each other and the technology.

Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2007). *Blended learning in higher education: Framework, principles, and guidelines*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Hardcover, xv + 245 pages. US \$38.00 ISBN: 978-0-7879-8770-1.

The purpose of this book is to provide a discussion of the issues surrounding the shift of the delivery of classes from traditional face-to-face to a blended approach that attempts to combine the best of face-to-face and online approaches. Blended learning is defined as the integration of face-to-face and online learning characterized by changes in student interactivity and engagement through a redesign of the communications process. (According to Arabasz and Baker (2003) blended learning is offered in 80 percent of all higher education institutions.) The authors of *Blended Learning in Higher Education* are very qualified and experienced faculty members who offer practical insight as well as a thorough aggregation of the research. The book is divided into two major sections: "Community of Inquiry Framework" (CoI) and "Blended Learning in Practice." Using the community of inquiry constructivist framework, the authors make a logical argument for the collaborative properties of learning to promote an enhanced and purposeful blended learning environment that involves students and faculty.

**G. Andrew Page** is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of Alaska Anchorage where he is program coordinator for the e-Learning Graduate Certificate Program.

The premise is that the ultimate goal is to create a community of inquiry in which learners are fully engaged and responsible. A blended learning environment offers the potential not only to create but to sustain a sense of community beyond the temporal limits of the face-to-face context (p.33).

Garrison and Vaughn provide supportive examples (scenarios) of courses that have transformed to a blended learning approach. This helps the reader to see and digest the best practices for addressing the systemic challenges associated with this paradigm shift in instructional design. In addition to providing sound pedagogical principles to achieve meaningful learning outcomes, the authors provide guidelines for faculty. The authors construct “. . . collaborative learning experiences congruent with the development of critical and creative thinkers in a rapidly evolving knowledge society” (p.154).

Appendices 1-11 provide supplemental information on organizational change, the transformation of courses to a blended learning format, a checklist for building a faculty community of inquiry, a student survey questionnaire for assessing learner experiences, the results an interview guide for faculty and their qualitative responses, a template for preparing a blended learning course outline as well as a sample outline, and a sample assessment rubric.

Overall, this resource was well-written and provided practical insight into some systemic challenges. As with any change, there is a mix of emotions associated with getting out of one’s comfort zone. This book helps ease that transition.

Smith, R. M. (2008). *Conquering the content: A step-by-step guide to online course design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. xvi +153 pages, paperback, US \$27.00. ISBN: 978-0-7879-9442-6.

With the increased use of digital resources, faculty subject matter experts (SMEs, in their respective fields) are required to develop an online course(s) without much experience in the area of instructional design. Smith offers a sound practical approach to designing content with the learner, future, organization, content, process, and navigation as key components. The author states, “My goal with *Conquering the Content* is to allow you to remain that subject matter expert” (p.3). The seven chapters are organized to assist the instructor who has limited resources and experience with designing and developing an online course. It is written for faculty who teach in a traditional environment and are migrating

their content to a web-based format, for support units like instructional designers, for administrators who manage this development, and for students in higher education or educational technology programs who aspire to work in the e-learning environment. The author is clever to mention that the book does not address the technical aspects of web-based learning, the interactivity tools of online learning, or the management of web-based courses. At the beginning of each chapter there is a bulleted list of the “Learning Goals/Outcomes” which tells the reader what they will be able to do after completion of the chapter. To “complete” the chapter requires that the reader participate in assignments and activities that support a constructivist philosophy. External hyperlinks to related content, as well as citations from books, are provided in the “Learning Resources” section at the beginning of each chapter, along with “Learning Activities” and “Lesson Evaluation.” This advance organization was helpful in navigating the book and interacting with the content. Appendix A is replete with forms that supplement the design and development process. Appendix B includes “Action Steps” that allow the reader/learner to complete items and reflect on their progress. Appendix C is a reprint of the American Association for Higher Education’s Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning (1996). My global reaction is that this e-learning resource addresses a key challenge for faculty and is a useful guide.

Zotero: Bibliographic Software <http://zotero.com>

Ever need assistance managing the voluminous amounts of literature that have been published on a topic? Need help with organizing research and easily adding updates to existing libraries? Zotero is a free plugin for the Firefox (<http://mozilla.firefox.com>) browser that allows users to import research from library databases for better organization and retrieval. There are also many ways that information can be imported or exported. For example, you can capture citations from webpages, store PDF’s, images and other indexed citations from large databases. It is convenient and useful in many ways. I like the ability to co-create digital libraries and be notified via RSS when a relevant research publication is tagged for retrieval from similar articles. Filters can also be setup for advanced searches. Users can also write notes that will be saved with each reference. Managing research literature with Zotero is an excellent means to expedite the process of not only locating relevant material but also staying current with recent publications without having to devote

strenuous time in the library. Zotero can run in the background of the Firefox browser, can be used with Microsoft Word or OpenOffice Writer, Wordpress, or most blogging software, and is written in numerous languages (40+) to make international collaboration more feasible. Since the program is web-based, you can access your personal library from any computer with web access.

NING: Build your own Social Network <http://ning.com>

Ning allows for the creation of a public or private social network in which participants can share their thoughts via a discussion forum. An example of an active Ning can be found at: <http://education.ning.com>. The management of many forms of communication is one of the strong attributes of a Ning. Compared to the “push” technology of a list-serv, the threads of conversation can be more easily accessed, allowing for richer interactivity and a stronger sense of community. In addition to each member having a personal blog, participants can upload topical photos, videos, participate in discussions, host webinars, manage groups and subgroups, and more. I feel that this is a great way to virtually interact in a variety of mediums. The Ning can be easily configured to add and aggregate a variety of tools, gadgets, and widgets to personalize the social network. How can this electronic resource be used in the context of adult education? Nings have been created for myriad groups including: Action Research, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, computer enthusiasts, and history buffs. It took about 10 minutes to set up a Ning for graduate students who wanted a network that aggregated their virtual social presence, their thoughts, and discussions and their digital artifacts. Because the Ning is user friendly, and there is no mandatory Java or html coding, the product has a very low learning curve. The sustainability and management issue of a Ning are the key variables. What keeps people returning to a Ning is new content and interactivity. The Ning has the capability of sending the Ning administrator and other members an email notice when new content is added. This function can also be activated or deactivated so that others in the community receive notification and updates. The Ning has enormous potential for providing structured community and while it is in its early stages of development, it has been my experience that its adoption has been enthusiastic by numerous communities. Adult education departments, workgroups, ESL classes, significant interest groups (SIGs) and those with a common cause can use this technology to enhance communication and build a

community of learners, practice, and/or inquiry.

**References**

Arabasz, P., & Baker, M. B. (2003). Evolving campus support models for e-learning courses. *Educause Center for Applied Research Bulletin*. Retrieved September 20, 2008 from <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EKF/ekf0303.pdf>