Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology
Revue canadienne de l'apprentissage et de la technologie

Online by Choice: Design Options for Flexible K-12 Learning. (2023)

Tim Dolighan

Cite this review

Article abstract

Online by Choice: Design Options for Flexible K-12 Learning by Stephanie Moore and Michael Barbour offers a comprehensive exploration of building a resilient educational ecosystem through blended and online learning options. This review highlights the authors' adept construction of practical, research-based strategies for K-12 communities. By distinguishing between emergency remote learning and purposefully designed online education, Moore and Barbour guide educators in identifying and addressing diverse learner needs in the context of designing and implementing online and blended learning. The authors stress the collaborative effort required between system administrators and teachers for successful online implementation. This review explores the book's utility for educators seeking to enhance their online teaching skills and suggests avenues for future professional learning development in online contexts. Ultimately, Online by Choice emerges as a vital resource for designing effective online learning experiences tailored to the evolving needs of K-12 learners.

Online by Choice: Design Options for Flexible K-12 Learning. (2023).

Reviewed by **Tim Dolighan**, *Ontario Tech University, Canada*

Abstract

Online by Choice: Design Options for Flexible K-12 Learning by Stephanie Moore and Michael Barbour offers a comprehensive exploration of building a resilient educational ecosystem through blended and online learning options. This review highlights the authors' adept construction of practical, research-based strategies for K-12 communities. By distinguishing between emergency remote learning and purposefully designed online education, Moore and Barbour guide educators in identifying and addressing diverse learner needs in the context of designing and implementing online and blended learning. The authors stress the collaborative effort required between system administrators and teachers for successful online implementation. This review explores the book's utility for educators seeking to enhance their online teaching skills and suggests avenues for future professional learning development in online contexts. Ultimately, *Online by Choice* emerges as a vital resource for designing effective online learning experiences tailored to the evolving needs of K-12 learners.

Keywords: blended learning, K–12 learning, online design, online learning

Introduction

Stephanie Moore and Michael Barbour have expertly constructed a practical research-based guide on how to build a flexible educational ecosystem that utilizes blended and online learning options. The authors provide practical planning steps and research-based online teaching and learning strategies to support and guide K-12 school communities looking to meet the needs of diverse learners. Online learning got a bad rap by many K-12 educators from the challenges and experience of having to suddenly transition to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors make the clear distinction between emergency remote learning and purposefully designed blended and online learning that fit within the larger educational ecosystem that seeks to meet the changing needs of learners. *Online by Choice* is a comprehensive and useful resource for school leaders, system planners, and educators who are committed to building a resilient educational system that includes online teaching and learning as part of a broader community seeking to meet learner needs.

The book moves the reader through identifying specific needs in the community and how to design appropriate online learning experiences that address those needs. Chapters 1–3 provides an introduction that clarifies what online and blended learning is and how it can be used successfully to meet diverse student needs. Rather than focus on the merits of online learning, the authors help the reader investigate the initial choice to offer online learning as a response to learning gaps and diverse needs. Moore and Barbour situate online learning within the context of the educational community and provide tools to help school districts identify those needs and use online learning as a solution to identify learning needs rather than presenting online learning as a solution in search of a context. Chapters 4 through 10 dive into quality online teaching based on research and practice and the final two chapters circle back to systemic supports and planning for online teaching and learning options.

The book includes useful suggestions and ideas to support the design and implementation of effective online spaces and resources to help educators meet the learning needs of their community. The authors make clear that effective planning and implementation of online spaces are a collaborative endeavour between system and school administrators in concert with teachers. Chapters 4 through 10 dig into the details of research-based quality online teaching and learning strategies to build online communities that facilitate learning and engagement online that includes system and school level planning and support. Chapter 4 covers design decisions and structure for online learning that supports student success. The authors describe effective structure and design of online learning that can facilitate self-regulation skills that includes access to social and community resources. The online design and structure advice and examples work particularly well for middle school and high school contexts that are the focus of the guidance provided by the authors. Similar guidance and expert direction would be useful for primary and junior (K–6) educators who identify learning needs that can be supported by online or blended learning. The transition to emergency online learning during the pandemic exposed unique challenges for teachers working with younger students (Dolighan, 2023)

The next chapter, Chapter 5, focuses on building community in the online context. Moore and Barbour employ the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison et al., 2000) and the Academic Communities of Engagement (ACE) framework (Borup et al., 2020) to create the foundation for building a vibrant community that supports students and addresses isolation. The CoI framework helps teachers frame online learning by establishing strong interaction between the teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence to build community. The personal community support described in the ACE framework presents an opportunity for planners to identify and integrate support necessary for academic success online. Moore and Barbour provide an example of how course community supports from an ACE plan can be used when instructional planning of technology evaluation and selection identifies the need for multiple-user creation features that support community and interaction as opposed to a one size fits all template.

Chapter 6 delves into how to foster student engagement and interaction through the lens of both the CoI and ACE frameworks. Consideration is given for planning who and what students interact with, concrete effective examples are given of how to facilitate learner interactions with content, peers, the instructor, the learning platform, and their environment as well as vicarious interactions. The next

chapters, 7 and 8, move into specific instruction strategies that consider how content is best organized and presented to support engagement and learning. Practical ways to utilize both asynchronous and synchronous modalities while providing clarity for online terms that are often misused are detailed. The authors breakdown and simplify online tools like *Zoom* to better understand affordances and limitations as they apply to instruction in online contexts. Chapter 8 includes specific attention to design principles for multimedia content presentation that supports learners' ability to organize and integrate new knowledge. Teachers will find strategies specific to STEM- and arts-based learning. Moore and Barbour address challenges of how to present digital content and create effective multimedia learning experiences based on learning theory and research. An example the authors use is in content presentation using the multimedia principle developed by Mayer (2020) that learning happens better from words and pictures versus words alone. Astutely designed digital content that considers cognitive load and how much information learners can process enhances learning. With specifically designed guidance based in research, the chapter details effective practices and principles to guide the creation of digital content development and presentation.

Chapter 9 builds an assessment strategy framework that views online assessment as a strategy that supports student learning. The approach reframes online assessment as a learning strategy rather than behaviour management and provides guidance and examples of how to implement assessment tools that support learning. Moore and Barbour acknowledge that policies and practices have not kept pace with advancements in online learning and educational technologies. The increase in the collection of data used to assess students and the need for educators and administrators to consider in the design phase how data is used and collected. As technology continues to develop at a rapid pace, the challenge to understand the implications and potential of technology, grounded in learning theory and research remains.

The importance of organization and communication when preparing to implement and deliver the online learning experience is underlined in Chapter 9. The authors provide practical steps to creating a learning climate supported by tips and checklists throughout the chapter. The collaboration between systemic planning and instructional decisions informing each other is weaved throughout the book, illustrated by examples of *handshakes* that help school leaders and educators at each stage of design and implementation.

The last two chapters revisit systemic supports and planning strategies to support plan and assess performance. Moore and Barbour identify numerous opportunities for administrators and educators to work together to plan and implement online learning. Chapter 12 identifies how the two levels can collaborate and inform one another. For example, procurement of technology decisions that include multiple stakeholders can avoid wasting time and resources and valuable energy.

The examples and ideas provided by Moore and Barbour offer detailed support for teachers designing and implementing online learning experiences that are driven by community needs. This book is a tremendous resource for teachers who are new to teaching online or are seeking to develop their online teaching skills. As online teaching becomes recognized as a valuable component of a diverse educational ecosystem, specific attention could be given to designing ongoing professional learning that

facilitates agency for teaching staff and meets the diverse needs of teachers who are designing and implementing the learning. It would be worth including how professional learning could be established in an online context that could access the affordances offered by online professional learning such as contextual and continuous learning within a community of practice that can be ongoing, as teachers continuously apply learning to practice in cycles of action (Morrison et al., 2021).

This book is a much-needed support for designing and implementing effective online learning experiences to meet the changing needs of K–12 learners and utilizing online learning affordances to enhance learning experiences based on identified needs in the school community.

References

Borup, J., Graham, C. R., West, R. E., Archambault, L., & Spring, K. J. (2020). Academic Communities of Engagement: An expansive lens for examining support structures in blended and online learning. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 68*(2)*, 807–832. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09744-x

Dolighan, T. (2023). Exploring Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Mixed Methods Multi-Phase Study. Brock University. http://hdl.handle.net/10464/18099

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical Inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education, 2*(2–3), 87–105. https://doi.org/10-1016/S1096-7516(00)00016-6

Mayer, R. (2020). Multimedia learning (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Morrison, l., Robb, J., Hughes, J., & Lam, M. (2021). Social presence in virtual professional learning. *Journal of Digital Life & Learning, 1*(1), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.51357/jdll.v1i1.160

Author

Tim Dolighan, Ph.D., is a sessional instructor at the Mitch and Leslie Frazer Faculty of Education at Ontario Tech University in Oshawa, Canada. Tim's research and teaching practice focuses on the affordances and advantages online learning can provide for meeting diverse student and professional learning needs. *Email*: tim.dolighan@ontariotechu.ca