Book Reviews

Learning with Online and Mobile Technologies: A Student Survival Guide
J. Macdonald & L. Creanor
Farnham, Surrey: Gower (2010) pp. 142 Pbk. £15.99
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It was with circumspection that this reviewer approached MacDonald and Creanor's short book, *Learning with Online and Mobile Technologies*. Being familiar with the formidable challenges that online and mobile technologies present some elearners, the book seemed too short to be able to live up to the optimism implicit in the subtitle. However, the book delivers more than was expected.

The target audience is learners in the early stages of transition from classroom-based, face-to-face, teacher-led learning to computer-supported, self-directed study whether in college, university or workplace settings. The authors address the reader as "*you*", write in a very naturalistic, conversational style, and seem to make no apparent or tacit assumptions about their readers being digital natives. They pitch their guidance to a broad church, offering snippets of relevant information about many facets of online and mobile technologies that might seem basic to some but arcane to others and, helpfully, relate information to bite-size nuggets of advice (in shaded text boxes) under the label '*How We Learn*'. This advice is placed alongside, as opposed to fully synthesised with, selected and abridged summations of relevant learning theory.

MacDonald and Creanor quickly establish the value of the book to prospective readers by featuring insightful and affirmative reviews of their book, many written by members of their target audience, throughout the book. Chapter 2 (*Student Voices*)

provides further mini-biographies of a cross section of the authors' e-learners supplemented by commentaries on their experiences and needs.

The structure of *Learning with Online and Mobile Technologies* is worthy of particular praise. With empathy, familiarity and relevance characterising the first two chapters, the third chapter addresses *Practicalities*, presumably founded on the authors' anticipation that an up-front focus on advice about practice will be more likely to engage the interest of novice e-learners than a conceptual framework. The remaining chapters (4 – 11) are organised into pairs, respectively focusing on how online and mobile technologies can contribute to key themes related to successful learning, including a linked *Survival Guide* that highlights good practice. Throughout this part of the book bullet-point lists and definitions in text boxes add to clear explications. A further scaffold to learning is the interactive website, reiterating the glossary, linking to additional resources and offering readers the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from access to key terms and resources related to online and mobile technologies.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on *Listening, Reading and Sense-making*. The book's subtitle is particularly apt here. For example, listed under the heading of *Tools you might use*, are file-sharing sites; podcasts; electronic voting; quizzes and simulations; virtual worlds; word processors; mind maps; memory sticks; social bookmarking; e-portfolios; blogs; web browsers and vidcasts, each of which is discussed, albeit briefly, in the context of how to make the most of the opportunities for learning afforded by them. *Quick tips* are offered alongside short extracts from a small number of research papers, but a discerning reader may feel uneasy about the lack of guidance on strategic and critical engagement with texts. For example, the authors' suggestions under the sub-heading *note taking* fall short of illustrating the possibilities for layout of notes or addressing the cognitive skills required for effective contraction of source texts and subsequent expansion of notes.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on *Communicating and Community* and draw attention to digital tools that are currently available and relevant in this context. Importantly, the authors do not shy clear of challenges posed by participation in online discussion forums, providing brief prompts to effective online communication with tutors and

peers. However, it is in this area that insufficiency is most apparent, the linguistic and affective skills and dispositions required of the participant warranting much more than is offered here. However, links to good support sites are provided.

The later chapters and closing appendices are useful and relevant to learners commencing online study in 2010. *Searching and Researching* (chapters 8 and 9) and *Writing and Presenting* (chapters 10 and 11) are aspects of academic life that merit as much support as possible, and the authors undoubtedly deliver in this respect.

As to the long term relevance of the book however, some doubts may rise. The digital tools currently available and the related practices deemed effective may, of course, be superseded very soon through increased access to emerging technologies and from a wider body of relevant research, but it is nonetheless clear that MacDonald and Creanor have identified a real and significant need and have addressed that need in a commendable manner. Insufficiencies notwithstanding, this reviewer and online teacher enjoyed and learned from this book and, for that, praise is sincere.