

Review: Greg Kearsley's *Online Education: Learning and Teaching in Cyberspace*

by Katrina Meyer

Greg Kearsley

Online Education: Learning and Teaching in Cyberspace

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Kearsley's *Online Education* is an excellent resource for individuals who are new to the world of online learning. If this describes you, then this is the book for you. It will help you finally understand the terms, concepts, and basic uses of the web for education and is the beginner's perfect primer to the field. Complex applications are explained in clear, straightforward prose. The impact of the web on the educational world is described with sympathy for the points of view of advocates and opponents, implementers and those who remain on the sidelines, confused about what to think (or do) about it all. If you have your own doubts about what to do in this world of online education, Kearsley effectively illuminates interesting sites and the new ways of educating as well as the potholes to avoid.

Put simply, *Online Education* does an excellent job of what it sets out to do: to help existing and prospective teachers or administrators understand what online education "is all about." If you think you are not ready for a book on telecommunications, networks, and technical terms, then *Online Education* may be the solution. If you fear that online learning may be too technical, you will enjoy the personal stories of the pioneers and innovators who developed the modern Internet. If you wonder what learning on the web looks like, the text provides numerous pictures of actual web sites to make what may seem abstract more visual and real. You are introduced to numerous terms and functions, issues and problems, that will likely leave the reader feeling better informed, modestly more

comfortable with this new thing, but no better informed on how to do it or do it well. In other words, if you are hunting for a "how to" guide on developing courses, building a web site, or choosing how best to use the Internet in your teaching, this may not be the book for you.

And this is the one and only criticism of the text—not that it does not do what it sets out to do—but it leaves you hungry for more practical, how-to advice. And that is not a bad outcome for an introductory book to an interesting new field.

Kearsley will introduce you to a number of new developments, including the virtual world of MUD/MOOs, electronic learning communities, or chat rooms. The book includes a short introduction to the research on whether online education results in learning as well as the larger implications of online learning. He discusses problems with privacy or intellectual property. And there is a short section on the emerging issues and technological solutions for students with disabilities. In other words, *Online Education* is a plate of hors d'oeuvres, a taste of what is to come, leaving the real meal for the adventurer who is motivated to dig deeper.

Fortunately, the author and the publisher—Wadsworth Thompson Learning—have foreseen your needs. *Online Education* is accompanied by the author's personal website (<http://home.sprynet.com/~gkearsley>) that provides hotlinks to many of the sites discussed only briefly in the text. There are hundreds of connections to an ever-growing number of web-based resources—online journals, research

results and learning concepts—that the curious reader can pursue on his/her own. Two links were especially helpful: an extensive explanation of over 50 learning theories and a page entitled, “It’s all about people.” Kearsley gives you the tools to explore on your own and reminds you that it is not about bandwidth or software, but people and, ultimately, learning.

This book/web combination heralds a new type of publication endeavor that combines the best of both worlds, creating something better—more rich, more varied, and more open to individual exploration—than a text alone. In other words, whatever you may think of the text itself, it is the tip of a new sort of iceberg: a web-based cornucopia of resources that appears more modest than it is and is more helpful than it pretends to be.

If you are intrigued by online learning and wish to explore what it can accomplish and what it may not, you will outgrow the guidance of Kearsley’s book and website. But you will be grateful for the tools he patiently and simply explained and the elementary steps he made possible.

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