

Book Reviews



Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction, Updated Edition

**By R. Conrad and J.A. Donaldson. 2011.
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 160 pages,
\$29.00, ISBN: 978-1-1180-1819-4**

The new edition begins with a chapter explaining engaged learning and providing an explanation of the four phases that move students from the role of “Newcomer” through “Cooperator” and “Collaborator” to “Initiator/Partner.” Likewise, instructors move from “Social Negotiator” through “Structural Engineer” and “Facilitator” to “Community Member/Challenger.” Essentially, you “teach” students how to be engaged learners and to gradually build community and take more responsibility for their own and their peers’ learning environment. This framework is prescriptive enough that the authors recommend at least one activity for each phase regardless of how well students are already oriented toward the course, learning online, or each other.

In Part One: Constructing Activities to Engage Online Learners, Chapter 2 talks about designing online environments and Chapter 3 offers a brief explanation of what to consider in assessing engaged learning and then some examples of team assessments, self-assessments, and discussion rubrics that, unfortunately, contain few new ideas. Chapter 4 offers activities to help students learn to use online tools, i.e., a skills survey, a scavenger hunt, and a syllabus quiz; all useful ideas for teaching students new to the online learning environment.

The rest of the book is Part Two: Activities to Engage Online Learners and each chapter provides a page or two of introduction to a type of activity and then a group of example activities ranging from icebreakers to learner-led activities. As might be expected, some of the activities are widely usable while others are more discipline-specific and might be difficult to transfer to other content areas.

Chapter 5 offers some good ideas for effective icebreakers such as “lineup,” where students score themselves on five statements about hobbies (reading, sports etc.) and the content of the course and then look for someone with the score that most closely matches their own (I’m assuming on all five statements rather than each statement or a total although that is not clear

from the directions). This seems a unique way to help students make connections.

Chapter 6 offers an overly simplistic view of dyad and team possibilities. There are really no truly collaborative activities, i.e., tasks where students must reach agreement on a single answer or plan except the “Medieval Shield” and it is still a compilation of images. More activities that require interaction, critical analysis, and/or reaching consensus would be more engaging than the critique or respond to each others’ work type of activities provided. The new edition does contain useful information on factors to consider in assigning groups.

Chapters 7 and 8 have some interesting and creative reflective and “authentic” activities. For instance, creating a bumper sticker to sum up your learning in a class could be fun. Likewise, interviewing a professional about his/her job, responsibilities, and transition from the beginning of his/her career to this position should be helpful for students. I particularly like the “Social Responsibility” group activity to create potential solutions for an actual community problem.

Chapter 9 does a good job of defining games as includes tasks that provide an element of engagement, decision making and knowledge acquisition from a new perspective” and simulations that “explore and replicate real-life situations” (Chapter 9, paragraph. 2). However, there are only three simulations offered and two are discipline-specific but offer templates that could be adapted to other content areas.

Finally, Chapter 10: Learner led Activities does a good job of listing the steps for creating and implementing learner led activities and provides some good examples of activities that students have created. It might have been more useful to have the assignment directions that the examples came from rather than the work the students created.

All in all, the book provides very brief information about each type of activity. If you are looking for in-depth guidelines about creating simulations or games or using dyads and groups in the online environment, look elsewhere. If you are looking for some simple examples, this is a solid resource. Some of the examples are fairly common but others are creative and could certainly provide a foundation for some interesting assignments.

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The primary difference between the 2004 and the 2011 editions is, disappointingly, a few updated references, a few paragraphs nodding toward new technologies (i.e., Skype) and blended courses, and some added Author's Notes about the activities which offer alternative ways to use them. There is no substantial difference in content, no new types of activities or chapters, and only one new activity, a survey about readiness for learning online. If you are using many of the activities from the 2004 edition and want to consider alternatives, the Author's Notes could be useful. Otherwise, the 2004 edition is roughly equivalent to the 2011 edition unless you want to read it on your iPad - only the 2011 edition is available as an eBook

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Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning

By Jose Antonio Bowen. 2012. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 352 pages, \$36.00, ISBN: 978-1-1181-1035-5

Introducing a new way to think about higher education, learning, and technology that prioritizes the benefits of the human dimension. José Bowen recognizes that technology is profoundly changing education and that if students are going to continue to pay enormous sums for campus classes, colleges will need to provide more than what can be found online and maximize "naked" face-to-face contact with faculty. Here, he illustrates how technology is most powerfully used outside the classroom, and, when used effectively, how it can ensure that students arrive to class more prepared for meaningful interaction with faculty. Bowen offers practical advice for faculty and administrators on how to engage students with new technology while restructuring classes into more active learning environments.

Reviews:

"This is an important book. Everyone who is concerned about the future of higher education should read it. In a highly readable and lively style, Bowen makes the most intelligent argument I've encountered about how we should think about teaching and learning and emerging technologies. It is also a powerful guide to more effective teaching and deeper learning."

—Ken Bain, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs and professor of history and urban

education, University of the District of Columbia.

"Teaching Naked is a persuasive proposal for using technology outside the classroom to free up time inside the classroom for more meaningful student-faculty interaction. Insightful and provocative, it is filled with practical advice for teachers, administrators, and institutions on how to navigate the revolutionary present in order to remain relevant for the future."

—Elizabeth Barkley, professor of music, Foothill College

"This is one of the most exciting books I have read in a long time. I could not stop sharing quotes from it with my wife, also an educator, while reading it. It provides incredible insight and foresight in a fresh and bold analysis of what we could be doing and should be doing with technology in higher education."

—L. Dee Fink, author

More information: <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118110358.html>

The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out

By Clayton M. Christensen and Henry J. Eyring. 2011. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 512 pages, \$33.00, ISBN: 978-1-1180-6348-4

The *Innovative University* illustrates how higher education can respond to the forces of disruptive innovation, and offers a nuanced and hopeful analysis of where the traditional university and its traditions have come from and how it needs to change for the future. Through an examination of Harvard and BYU-Idaho as well as other stories of innovation in higher education the authors decipher how universities can find innovative, less costly ways of performing their uniquely valuable functions.

The book offers new ways forward to deal with curriculum, faculty issues, enrollment, retention, graduation rates, campus facility usage, and a host of other urgent issues in higher education

It discusses a strategic model to ensure economic vitality at the traditional university, and contains novel insights into the kind of change that is necessary to move institutions of higher education forward in innovative ways

This book uncovers how the traditional university survives by breaking with tradition, but thrives by building on what it's done best.

More information: <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118063481.html>