

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Fallows, S. & Bhanot, R. (Eds.) (2005). *Quality Issues in ICT-Based Higher Education*. RoutledgeFalmer: New York. Pages: 224. Price 45.95 USD (paper).

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As explained in the preface, this is the second book of two linked volumes dealing with implementing information and communication technologies within higher education settings. While the first book presented a series of case studies detailing examples of how ICT modes of delivery were incorporated into educational programs, the focus of the current volume is on how educational quality can be kept front and centre as new ICT processes are integrated into various higher education settings. The papers come from a variety of institutions in a number of different countries, bringing a rich perspective on the challenges and key strategies involved in this process.

Quality is addressed very broadly across the range of papers through identification of a range of factors that can affect the educational quality of online programs. The editors, Fallows and Bhanot, raise some introductory questions in the first paper about the nature of quality (that it is related to appropriateness of purpose) and identify some areas of quality improvement arising from ICT, such as electronic library resources, ease of feedback, and access to educational opportunities.

The papers take a largely pragmatic stance in their analyses and the book would be of interest to anyone involved in developing or expanding ICT use in their institution.

Their value lies also in the focus on educational quality. Thus the various projects and descriptions illustrate how technologies can be implemented in ways to promote a higher quality of learning, to promote sound pedagogical practice and leverage the affordances offered by particular communications technologies, such as the collaborative interaction and feedback and reflective opportunities afforded by asynchronous discussion.

However, the papers also cover a broad range of topics—including ICT and assessment, the implications of ICT for research, for e-mentoring and careers education, for disabled students, and for professional development. The papers also examine problem areas like computer anxiety and Internet cheating.

Papers in the first part of the book take a broader, more institutional perspective on issues of quality using various online learning environments,

including WebCT, Blackboard as well as other ICT tools. Deepwell and Beaty's paper (Paper 2) provides a detailed process account highlighting key requirements for each of four phases of a five year ICT implementation plan in the UK. It helpfully describes points where things nearly went awry, such as the pace and control of the change process, and offers practical steps to avoid such problems. Paper 6 (Jordan & Jameson) takes staff development issues as the focus for identifying, and offering solutions for, the key barriers to developing an e-university. Paper 3 (Fallshaw & McNaught) offers an Australian perspective on the process of change calling for attention to issues relating to educational quality and outlining important challenges to these goals including workload, timescale and momentum. Paper 4 (Hart) examines implications of applying external guidelines from the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education as a way to evaluate ICT-based teaching and learning, and the paper describes the significant issues in managing change that arise from these guidelines.

Opportunities offered by ICT for networked professional development are explored in two linked papers, Papers 11 (Lally & McConnell) and 12 (Bowskill & Foster). The first of these two considers a range of practical and collaborative strategies in current practice for supporting networked PD, including mentoring, computer-mediated conferences, collaborative projects and online guests. The second paper presents a case study that employs a number of these techniques in a professional development course for staff developers. Among other things results suggested that such an experience can change attitudes in a positive direction toward the effectiveness of online communication and the usefulness of collaborative work.

The quality of assessment is addressed in two papers, Paper 7 (Steven & Zakrzewski) and Paper 15 (Fain & Bates) on Internet cheating. Steven and Zakrzewski's paper proposes a structured approach to computer-based assessments that focuses on balance of criteria rather than searching for an ideal solution--an approach they call the Catherine Wheel model (Zakrzewski & Steven, 2000), and the paper works through the various elements that comprise quality viewed through a computer based assessment model. The Fain & Bates paper offers resources and strategies for both detecting and dealing with internet cheating, and suggests that providing education and information about internet cheating to students is a key way to counter the mounting opportunities to cheat online.

The remaining papers in the book deal with some unique issues related to ICT and quality.

Paper 5 (Griffiths) describes the complexities and opportunities of the in-process implementation of a web-based distance education system that is learner-centred within a fundamentally teacher-centred learning environment. Here the technology offers the possibility and impetus for re-examining current pedagogical practice--something that is often entrenched and hard to revisit.

E-mentoring is an issue explored in Paper 10 (Field), compared to traditional mentoring and identifying the kinds of training and structures needed to maintain the quality and effectiveness of the process. The paper looks at advan-

tages of both individual mentoring and team mentoring. The team mentoring is an interesting application of this well-established strategy and may offer unique advantages in providing broader feedback in a less intimidating context than might be the case in face-to-face settings.

Paper 8 (Bromage) examines the role of ICT in the changing process of carrying out research. This paper details a number of different software applications and facilities for different aspects of the research process including gathering knowledge, designing and gathering research data and data analysis. The descriptions are useful and relevant and while concluding that ICT can improve the quality of the research process, also warns against according too much “intelligence” to the various tools, and the importance of balanced researcher judgment.

Paper 9 (Eastwood) presents an account of the opportunities and challenges of using ICT for disabled students. Written from the perspective of a disabled student, the author details the range of technologies available for the support of various disabilities and the challenges in their deployment that continue in the face of inadequate planning and preparation.

Post-graduate supervisor development developed through an interesting online self-reflective process is the area of research presented in Paper 13 (Kandlbinder). This program encourages supervisors to reflect in a structured way on their own experiences as students in relation to the research on effective supervisory practices, through participating in a series of online modules. There are both individual and collaborative aspects to the experience and success is demonstrated by a steadily increasing enrollment of supervisors in the program.

Another rather unique strategy is presented in Paper 14 (Tandy & Cousin). This paper describes a hands-on process for dealing with computer anxiety in which humanities students learn how to develop a fully-costed project proposal including computer hardware specifications. High failure rates in the past led the course developers to try new strategies and thus evolved the “scissors-and-cardboard” approach in which students literally construct and deconstruct computers made from cardboard and thereby lessen their anxiety and increase their knowledge and sense of competence.

Finally, an area that seems to fit well with the affordances of online communications technology is that of careers education (Paper 16, Kumar). This final paper describes the use of an online approach to a careers advisory service in order to more effectively integrate careers advice with the academic program and deliver services in a more timely, relevant and integrated way. As pressure to align university programs with necessary skills for the job market increases, the utility of this approach provides both efficiency and equality of access.

Taken together, the papers in this volume provide informative and thoughtful perspectives on a wide range of contexts in which ICT quality is an ongoing issue. The ideas and strategies are practical and generalizable to higher education institutions across many cultural contexts. ♣