

BOOK REVIEW

Lucy Green, *Book Review Editor*

***Handbook of Distance Education* (3rd ed.), by Michael Grahame Moore**

Bobbie Seyedmonir

West Virginia State University

Handbook of Distance Education (3rd ed.). Michael Grahame Moore (Ed.) (New York, NY: Routledge 2013, 729 pages, \$114.95)

There are books in every discipline that researchers or practitioners in the field should read. In the field of online and distance learning, the *Handbook of Distance Education*, edited by Michael Grahame Moore, is one of those must-read books. In its third edition, the *Handbook* provides a research-based framework for the discipline, affording readers both a context for research in the field and a guide for practice. This is especially beneficial for new graduate students or practitioners who have come to distance education from other backgrounds. For those who are long-term scholars or practitioners in the field, the handbook serves as an update on current practices and research in the field.

The handbook is organized into five major parts that span a wide range of subjects in distance education literature:

- Part 1: Historical and Conceptual Foundations;
- Part 2: Learning, Learners, and Learner Support;
- Part 3: Design and Teaching;
- Part 4: Policies, Administration, and Management; and
- Part 5: Audiences and Providers.

HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

In the section, “Historical and Conceptual Foundations,” Moore selects chapters that provide readers with a brief history of distance education and its rise into a formal discipline as well as an introduction to the theoretical framework on which distance education is built. Starting with a dense chapter entitled “A History of Scholarship,” by Linda Black, readers get a historical perspective on key developments in distance education research as it grew

• **Bobbie Seyedmonir**, Director, Center for Online Learning, West Virginia State University, 227 Wallace Hall, Institute, WV 25112-1000. Telephone: (304) 766-3170. E-mail: bobbies@wvstateu.edu

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into its own field of study. It then continues with chapters addressing distance education's roots in correspondence education and introduces the seminal work of Charles Wedemeyer in "University Correspondence Study: A Revised Historiographic Perspective and Charles A. Wedemeyer: Visionary Pioneer of Distance Education," respectively. This section also includes an overview of fundamental constructs of the field including an excellent chapter overviewing research on transactional distance written by Moore.

The first section is somewhat verbose at times, and readers might initially question the need to read about correspondence education or the development of professional societies in the field. However, these foundational chapters provide a much-needed historical context for the discipline. In fact, Moore seems to take great care to ensure that the importance of this first section is highlighted for the reader. The reason for this care is encapsulated by Farhad Saba's statements in his chapter "Building the Future: A Theoretical Perspective," in which he laments the fact that distance education seems to be filled with practitioners who believe that the history of distance education "starts when they become interested in the field" (p. 50). He also calls for a systems approach to research in the field based on the theoretical foundations of the discipline, namely Moore's theory of transactional distance (e.g., Moore, 1973). As a practitioner in the field of distance education, this section illustrated a phenomenon I have found in my own reviews of the literature, namely that distance education, perhaps more than other areas of study, is rife with newcomers reinventing the wheel without regard to past work and research in the area. Therefore, it was with Saba's call for a systems approach to distance education in mind that I read the rest of the handbook.

Beyond merely providing a history and theoretical foundation for the discipline, the handbook also addresses current trends and practices as they relate to students, designers/teachers, and administrators. I would strongly

suggest reading through all these sections as opposed to selecting the one section or part, largely because issues affecting one group invariably have implications for the others, and it is through this active process of finding connections between chapters that a systems view of the discipline is developed.

LEARNING, LEARNERS, AND LEARNER SUPPORT

For example, "Cognitive Perspective on Online Learning Environments," by Richard West, Michael Hannafin, Janette Hill, and Liyan Song, provides a wonderful explanation of key educational psychology constructs of cognitive load, motivation, scaffolding and how these theories translate into distance education. This knowledge is not only beneficial to designers of distance educational courses, but also to administrators who work with designers to guide institutional planning and policy-making. In fact, without this integrated, systems approach, positive student outcomes dwindle as was discussed Shanna Smith Jaggers in "Online Learning in Community Colleges" in Part 5 of the handbook. The fact that community college populations often experience poor success rates in distance or online courses due to a conflagration of issues such as student readiness, lack of faculty development, and lack of administrative/institutional support is a lesson for everyone in the field.

Similarly, "Enabling Learning for Disabled Students," by Susan Crichton and Shelley Kinash, provides information for all involved and the authors' discussion of current research on the potential of iPads and other tablets to assist students with disabilities as well as the current push for accessibility in distance education to be valuable and timely. This one chapter has implications for the student, but obviously affects course design and teaching as research on the application of accessible design principles such as universal design for learning (CAST, n.d.) as well as inclusion of more mobile and tablet friendly applications in

online course designs are needed. There are also implications for administrators who need to ensure there is adequate training and support for both faculty and students and that institutional American with Disabilities Act policies include distance education practices.

Research into and discussion of student learning theory and student support in distance education is valuable, and will become even more critical as the “typical” student evolves. In my own practice, I have noticed that as distance and online programs become more commonplace, the self-directed, self-motivated adult learner who chose the course voluntarily is increasingly being joined by newer students who are often less academically ready, are taking the course as part of degree requirements (thus perhaps less motivated), and are less capable of the self-monitoring or self-directed learning that is needed. William Anderson alludes to this change in his chapter, “Independent Learning,” by stating that distance education classrooms are becoming more diverse, including students “who may not wish or prefer to undertake study at a distance, and who do not bring with them the range or level of cognitive or metacognitive skills appropriate for distance study” (p. 100). However, while this statement is made, there is no chapter that addresses the issue of changing student populations directly. I would have liked to have seen a chapter on developing student support structures in the administration section, but perhaps that will come with the next edition of the handbook.

DESIGN AND TEACHING

This does not mean, however, that the handbook does not provide research-based information that can benefit these populations. The section on design and teaching incorporates many best practices in instructional design processes for distance education and includes discussions of design practices and how they affect student achievement. Contributing authors in this part, such as Som Naidu, in his

chapter, “Instructional Design Models for Optimal Learning,” provide an excellent discussion of designs for distance learning, including “a proactive approach to student support by emphasizing the need to conceptualize all learning and teaching support activities as part of the instructional design process” (p. 272). Part of this type of design includes active, student-centered, scenario-based, and problem-based learning which is more motivating to students, provides more opportunities for feedback and remediation, and creates a more authentic experience for students.

POLICIES, ADMINISTRATION, AND MANAGEMENT

As a distance education administrator and faculty member, I found all sections helpful in guiding institutions planning in distance education not only because it helped inform my own practice, such as developing infrastructure, training and support to both students and faculty, but also because it provides a research-based reasoning that I can use to communicate with individuals and administrators outside of the area. Additionally, the section “Policies, Administration, and Management” provides needed guidance in the areas of management, policy creation, accreditation, and cost management. “Institutional Policy Issues,” by Michael Simonson and Charles Schlosser, is of particular use to entities seeking to develop the institutional infrastructure necessary to develop effective distance education programs. This chapter provides a great deal of information regarding what types of policies are needed and different models of implementation. The chapter “Legal and Recent Copyright Issues,” by Tomas Lipinski, is up to date, including recent influential legal cases such as *Cambridge U. Press et al. v. Mark P. Becker et al.* (2012).

AUDIENCES AND PROVIDERS

The final section, “Audiences and Providers,” provides an overview of the various distance

education practices outside of traditional higher education. This includes K-12, community colleges, industry, and military. This section provides a broad view of how distance education is used in these areas. However, more development or inclusion of these “other” applications throughout the rest of the handbook would have been welcome. While the issues of distance education discussed in previous parts are often relevant to non-higher education applications, the chapters in this section at times seem like add-ons. The chapter on military use is more of an overview, and there is very little written on research into the efficacy of the models used by the military to train a dispersed force. Additionally, while K-12 applications have received more focus in this edition of the handbook, the subject of K-12 distance education is underrepresented and this signifies a dual need for more research/scholarship on how K-12 differs from traditional distance education as well as the role K-12 must play in preparing future distance education students.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The handbook closes with a chapter by Jan Visser, “Learning in a World of Blurred Boundaries,” in which he describes two possible futures for the field. One future consists of distance education as an outcropping of higher education and designed with the traditional degree program in mind. The other future of distance education focuses more on global efforts to use distance education as a way to equalize knowledge access between industrialized and developing nations. I thought this chapter was very timely considering the rise of massive open online courses and the increase in competency-based degrees programs (Parry, 2013). Visser’s discussion of open learning initiatives and the need to reinvent learning without being bound by our traditional ideas of education seemed to encapsulate the general sense in the handbook that it is time for the discipline to move beyond just attempting to

prove its equivalency to traditional education, but to begin thinking about the field in terms of its own unique opportunities and best practices. It will be interesting to see in future editions whether it will be “irrelevant,” as Visser puts it, or if the handbook addresses “the notion of distance education, with its historical connotations of emulating the traditional formal schooling practice and striving for equivalent experiences” (p. 708).

In short, the handbook provides a panoramic view of the discipline and attempts to put the various areas of research into a larger context. However, one must use caution and read with the understanding that the *Handbook of Distance Education* is meant to be a starting point as opposed to a destination, meaning that one is expected to move on and delve further into his or her own areas of interest and should not claim expertise upon completion of this one book. Moore’s recommendation for reading, stating one should “skim the whole book, and subsequently, after deciding on an area of research, take the relevant chapters as the starting point for identifying the literature in that area” (p. xvii), further emphasizes this idea. In essence, the handbook acts as a compass, pointing practitioners in the direction of quality research and practice in the field, and should be on the bookshelf of any graduate student, faculty, or administrator serious about working or researching in the field.

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