Khan, Badrul ed (2001) *Web-Based Training* Educational Technology
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$89.95)

Distributed learning environments that enable learning anywhere and anytime
meet the increasing demands for educational flexibility in our rapidly changing
society. Therefore, it is no surprise that numerous books on e-learning are
appearing on the market. This is one of those books, a follow-on volume to
Web-Based Instruction, which was in 1997 one of the very first, and most
influential, books in the field of e-learning. This new book is impressive in
many respects. It aims to provide a comprehensive examination of all major
aspects of using the Web for learning and contains 63 chapters and more
than 600 pages, largely written by leading experts in the field. The book
contains a wealth of useful ideas and approaches. The many figures and
tables are clearly designed and the book contains an excellent subject index.
The mere breadth and size of the volume makes it difficult to review. But, in
retrospect, I realise that I have read most of its chapters with pleasure.

The book is divided into three parts. The first, the introduction, consists of
seven chapters describing the advantages and limitations of e-learning, its
benefits and obstacles, technological and organisational conditions, and major
trends. Section 2, "Design and development perspectives", consists of no less
than 32 chapters discussing issues such as template-based design and
authoring systems, games and simulations, collaborative web-based learning,
web-based assessment and testing, and web-based course management and
administration. The first chapter of this batch opens with the description of a
framework for web-based learning by Badrul Khan. This framework is helpful
to position the many chapters of the book in one organised structure and to
understand their interconnections. But, on the other hand, the insights
presented in the different chapters reflect a degree of diversity that is
impossible to grasp in one common framework.

<u>Web-based assessment</u> is part of that overall framework and discussed in
several chapters. One chapter (by Zhang, Khan, Gibbons and Ni) provides a
review of web-based assessment tools - such as Internet Test System, Micro
Test Pro, NetTest, QuestionMark, Quizmaker, RAGS, Tutorial Gateway,
WWWAssign, Web@ssessor, and Webtester. Most of these systems support
non-performance-related assessments of knowledge, using true/false,
multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, matching, sequencing and
essay questions. The possibilities for web-based performance tests, which
provide realistic action demands in the context of realistic problems staged in
fairly realistic settings, are yet severely limited. Tools for the development of
performance assessments lag far behind tools for the development of
objective assessments. In addition, the assurance of student privacy and
security is still an unresolved issue. The major problem is no doubt the
authenticating of student identity at the time of testing.

Section 3, "Implementation and evaluation perspectives", consists of 24 chapters. To me this is particularly interesting as it starts where most other books end: the typical e-learning text focuses on the design and development of web-based training systems and, at best, describes dedicated approaches for evaluation; critical implementation issues are often neglected. In contrast, *Web-Based Training* pays ample attention to critical factors for successful implementation, such as teacher training and staff development, effectively dealing with copyright matters, and analysing costs and determining return on investment.

To summarise, this is a well edited, comprehensive and encyclopedic work with many high-quality contributions on web-based training. It provides a wealth of perspectives on many different aspects of its field. As noted by the editor himself, this is not a cookbook and it is not an introductory text. For readers who are relatively new to the field of e-learning and who are looking for a straightforward introduction, this one is probably not the best choice. But it will no doubt be a great source of inspiration for those who are actively involved in the design, development, implementation or evaluation of web-based training.

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