

Book review

Making the move to K-12 online teaching: Research-based strategies and practices

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Making the Move to K–12 Online Teaching: Research-Based Strategies and Practices focuses on helping to design and update virtual education specifically in a K–12 environment.

Author Kerry Rice, currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Technology at Boise State University, is an experienced consultant and educator in the field of K–12 virtual education. The audiences for this book are virtual educators who want to expand their virtual experience, and new teachers who want to enter the field. The book is also recommended for higher education professors who prepare future teachers.

The nine chapters of the book follow the same basic format. Real-life stories, related examples, and appropriate graphics are scattered throughout the book. Each chapter concludes with a summarising “Final Thoughts,” while the “Apply What You Have Learned” and “Resources” sections offer an opportunity to get hands-on with the chapter topics.

The book starts with the basics of what defines virtual education, who is involved on both sides of the computer, and the standards that these various programmes are held to. Then there is a quick shift into appropriate pedagogical styles for virtual learning. The author clarifies the similarities between traditional face-to-face and virtual teaching strategies. Challenges arise as a shift is made to a learner-centred style of teaching, forcing the educator to become project manager, instructional designer, and e-learning expert as well as being the teacher.

The author works to alleviate perceived challenges by expanding on a wide variety of tools available to the online educator. Starting with the basics of a Learning Management System, Rice discusses a wide variety of asynchronous and synchronous options. Topics include online communication (chat and web-conferencing), using the internet as a resource (video-sharing, simulations, and games), collaboration (blogs, wikis, concept maps, and social networking), presentations, and website creation (design and multimedia software).

The book continues to progress in a practical fashion, helping to define virtual user roles and set up appropriate rules for the virtual classroom. This is a direct lead-in to building a sense of community, which is an integral part of teaching virtually. Taking advantage of the various tools and options mentioned will help the virtual educator to design opportunities for collaboration, which is a key to building a sense of community.

Continuing to foster the theme of collaboration, the author guides the reader in facilitating online discussions and lesson design. The basics of management, support, and assessments are discussed in terms that can be applied to a wide variety of scenarios. The author offers strategies in choosing the proper tools and, as with the other chapters, showcases specific examples that offer insight to the reader.

The final portions of the book view specific student needs for the virtual environment. An entire chapter is given to the topic of students with special needs. The author supplies guidelines for identifying students, and ways to differentiate and offer support in a virtual environment. The book concludes by addressing what it means for a student to be a digital citizen, and the importance of online equity and safety. *Acceptable Use Policies* examples are listed to help the educator get a head start on the process.

As the author recommends, this book will probably be most appreciated by educators with experience or professors of incoming teachers. New teachers on their own should tread with caution, especially if their knowledge of virtual education is limited. The book quickly becomes dense with information that could be overwhelming for the uninitiated. The author realizes this, and suggests that while the reader considers the wide variety of tools offered, they should move slowly, figuring out what is best for the individual.

If the reader follows this advice, they will emerge with a vast array of knowledge and a strong foundation for virtual environments. The “Apply What You Have Learned” and “Resources” sections help this process, as does the e-portfolio activity at the end of every chapter. Using the sections in tandem, the reader will learn from a hands-on perspective, driving the key points home. This is not a passive task, as the author does not hand-hold. All of the materials needed are available to use, either in the text or on the accompanying website,¹ but it’s up to the reader to participate in virtual situations. The e-portfolio activity allows the reader to sum up the experience, keeping an active log of their progress.

In a book packed with information, the chapter on students with special needs is worth noting. This group is often ignored in discussions about virtual environments, but Rice offers appropriate and logical suggestions to help a particular section of students to find success. The ideas here will undoubtedly be of use to virtual educators who want to create an inclusive community.

Overall, the author has provided the reader with a book packed with sound information, useful tools and supportive activities. If willing to put in the time, the reader will certainly find the guidance they need as they continue to shape their virtual classroom.

¹ There is an online supplement for this book at <https://sites.google.com/site/bestonlineteacher/home>