Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace
Effective Strategies for the Online Classroom

Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999, 206 pages
www.jossey-bass.com
ISBN 0-7879-4460-2 (softcover), $44.95 CAN

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What are the characteristics of an online community? Palloff and Pratt suggest they are honesty, responsiveness, relevance, respect, openness, and empowerment: characteristics that most instructors already support in resident classes. However, they begin with the premise that although these are familiar to faculty and instructors, many online courses do not embody these values because learning to implement them requires different strategies from those for resident teaching. They comment:

> Students in a face-to-face classroom see each other and work together, getting to know each other better through that process. How then, can we make that happen when all contacts consist of text on a screen? In fact we cannot make it happen instantaneously. It must be facilitated. (p. 29)

These attributes and the concern for community are at the core of the book, and the authors have focused on how to build such a community in cyberspace. They move through chapters on creating effective syllabi, to a description of various forms of learner collaboration which an instructor can use, to creating opportunities for reflection to evaluating performance. Their examples, usually from counseling or organizational studies courses, reflect their own expertise. The authors are graduates of the Fielding Institute, a distance education graduate institution offering degrees in psychology, human and organizational systems, design, human development, leadership, and change. They are managing partners of a company that provides consulting in distance education, team-building, organizational development, and online continuing educa-tion courses. The book is easy to read, has lots of references (mainly US), and includes plenty of examples of instructors' course syllabi and com-ments from students' online discussions.

It joins others that have been written for the newcomer to online learning and seems best oriented to university faculty. It would be most comfortable for those who support a constructivist learning orientation and expect a lot of student interaction. (One course

outline asked for students to sign in on five out of seven days—attendance as well as quality of participation counted!) It was somewhat disorienting to see references to Ottawa University until I found that it was Ottawa, Kansas. And no accompanying Web site!

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