

Oosterhoff, A., Conrad, R.M., & Ely, D.P. (2008). *Assessing learners online*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall. 242 pp.)

*Lorraine Carter*

*Assessing learners online* by Albert Oosterhof, Rita-Marie Conrad, and Donald P. Ely is a resource that teachers and instructional designers who work across the educational continuum will find useful. Based on content from a Master's level course in distance and distributed education, this book shares a wealth of theoretical and practical information about educational assessment. While assessment can receive short shrift in teacher education programs and instructional design practice given the perception that assessment is the less glamorous component of pedagogy, online education has pushed assessment to the forefront. In part, this is because teachers who work with online and distance students have limited to no face-to-face interaction with their students; therefore, they do not have the same informal indicators of a problem or challenge with their assessment strategies. Instead, they must get the assessment strategies "right" well before they are delivered to students. Additionally, valid and reliable assessment is the best way that online educators have to demonstrate that their students are experiencing achievement levels equivalent to those of students in more traditional learning settings. Those who work in online and distance education realize how important it is to be able to provide this information to naysayers of online learning.

The book is divided into five parts which are further subdivided into fourteen chapters. Part I called Establishing a Framework for Assessing Students provides an overview of the historical landscape of distance education as well as a review of the key issues of assessment including measurement of knowledge, validity, and generalizability. Part II explores how to determine what should be assessed and how the assessment will be used and interpreted. Parts II, IV, and V focus on specific issues and challenges of online assessment. Part III examines the design and administration of online written assessments; Part IV online performance-based assessments; and Part V online interaction and collaboration.

While the authors do an excellent job in their discussions of the psychometric aspects of educational assessment, their presentations of the three kinds of assessments used with greatest frequency in online education are not always as helpful as they might be. Regrettably, the

authors continue to provide overly generous doses of theory after they have promised to be more practically focused. Further instructional and graphical design of these chapters is recommended in order to ensure reader engagement. Although the authors have included summaries, glossaries, and activities called Enhance Your Understanding, and lists of additional readings, these components strike the reader as afterthoughts rather than important learning opportunities; perhaps this is because they are presented at the end of each chapter rather than throughout the chapter. Positively, within each chapter, there are a number of activities called Apply What You Are Learning with possible responses presented at the end of the chapter.

Especially well done are the authors' treatments of creating and managing of online performance based assessments and assessing online interaction. The former is an area that requires considerable skill and planning in all learning settings and especially in the online environment. The latter topic is, without question, one that has assumed a primary place in online learning and requires considerable expertise to ensure validity and fairness for stakeholders.

In closing, *Assessing learners online* is rich with information about educational assessment and accurately identifies the three principal ways by which assessment is occurring in today's online educational setting. As a "read," it requires discipline to discover the many pearls it offers regarding online assessment. Nevertheless, it is well worth the investment of time and effort on the part of those teachers and instructional designers committed to excellence in assessment in the online educational setting.

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