Reviews

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It is rare to find a book that is both a “stand alone” treatise on teaching and learning in higher education and a tribute to the lifelong work of a teacher and mentor. Ashwin’s book is such a rare find.

All of the contributors have been, or continue to be, active students or colleagues of Lewis Elton, whose work in the UK in the late 1960s (and still today) helped bring educational technology to the prominent place it currently has. As noted in the Foreword, “Lewis was one of the first to recognise that the professor’s knowledge [of the discipline] counted for little if students were not learning. Effective teaching depends not only on the teacher’s knowledge but also on the teacher’s skills and strategies for teaching.” (p xi)

With this in mind, Ashwin and his contributors set out to explore the current state of change within teaching and learning in higher education and to suggest the options for future development. To accomplish this, Ashwin created two book end chapters. First is the Introduction, entitled “The development of learning and teaching in higher education: the changing context”; this sets the stage for the discussion. At the other extreme, Conclusions—entitled “Interpreting the developments: possible futures for learning and teaching in higher education”—wraps up the discussion chapters with a number of interesting questions for the future.

The body of the book, written by various contributors who are well known in the area of educational technology and e-learning, consists of three parts: the development of students’ learning in higher education; the development of learning technologies in higher education; and the development of teaching in higher education. While they all have important points to bring to the conversation, it is Diana Laurillard’s chapter on “E-learning in higher education” that most resonates with me—as my own institution struggles to create its corporate strategy on technology-enhanced teaching and learning. In her chapter, she argues that within the university, e-learning “could do more” (p 82) for teaching and learning. She notes “[t]hat, for the educational innovator, who seriously wishes to improve the quality of education and the learning experience, it is imperative that we create an educational system that is clear about its values and sets its aims and ambitions high, and that is capable of rapid adaptation to its technological, as well as social, cultural and political environment” (p 84). And she asks “Why are we not doing more to achieve this?” (p 83).

A very good question! Indeed one of many from a book well worth taking the time to read.

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This collection is the first book about audience response [voting] systems, ARSs, which, typically, allow each student in a group to vote in real time, at each node in a session choosing one of several options using the buttons on a handset. The signal from the handsets, either infra-red or radio wave, are detected and processed by a PC that displays them graphically with a digital projector. Depending on the technology and the number of handsets in use, voting results can appear in seconds or a few minutes. ARSs are typically used in lecture theatres with large groups but also in classrooms with smaller ones.

If you are unfamiliar with them, it is not surprising. Although they have a history in HE of four decades, only in the last few years have handsets begun to migrate from the hidden classrooms of enthusiasts into the mainstream, due partly to falling equipment costs and an increasing number of manufacturers, and partly to the changing expectations of both students and teachers.

If you are sceptical—wondering why you would want to give multiple choice tests to large groups—then this book will make you reconsider. It is predominantly concerned with pedagogical issues: how to use the technology in various ways to engage students in productive learning activities. If you are already interested in the possibilities, this book will provide plenty of ideas and advice from authors based in the USA, UK, Canada, Australasia, and South Africa.

I admit to being an enthusiast (and I have to declare an interest as a co-author of Chapter 21), but I tried to take a sceptical position when reading the book: Who is in control of the learning-teaching situation when ARSs are used—learners or teachers, or technology? What beneficial pedagogies does the technology enable? What evaluations have been done? The answers, briefly, are that the technology is not in control, but that teachers can use it to share control with their students; that a number of teaching strategies have been developed and tested; and that typically evaluations have very positive outcomes.

The four chapters in Section 1, describing aspects of the history of technology by authors involved in its development, were absorbing. Louis Abrahamson gives a substantial “brief history” in Chapter 1, based on his personal involvement since 1985. At first, he encountered suspicions from colleagues that the technology was to be used for monitoring and controlling students. These fears soon dissipated “after the classroom successes were becoming too obvious to refute”. He suggests that using the system leads teachers to question their pedagogical strategies and discover better ways to teach. (It may also be the case that it was and is those teachers who are reflecting on pedagogy who will experiment with such systems: unless one were concerned for student learning one would not see the need for the communication in the classroom that these systems support.)

Abrahamson and others review the evidence for the educational effects. The reaction of students is generally overwhelmingly positive: “the great majority of students believed they understood the subject better, came to class better prepared, paid more attention in class, and enjoyed it more”. There is less literature cited here on the effects on learning outcomes, but it is also very positive.

Chapter 2 by Eugene Judson and Daiyo Sawada provides a less personal, systematic history and a review of the literature on evaluations: “has student learning been enhanced?” and, if so, “what led to such improvement?” Firstly, student reaction is generally positive: research shows clearly that use of an ARS motivates students. On student performance, much will depend on the teaching strategy of which the technology is a part. Early use was as a lecture-

1Some alternative labels are listed on Steve Draper’s Interactive Lectures web site at http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/illg/main.html#Using.
pacing device with a behaviouristic flavour; dividing a lecture into sections and checking individual understanding after each section before moving on. There was little evidence of improved outcomes from this strategy. However, from about 1990, pedagogy was influenced by constructivist principles and now an ARS is often used to support sharing of thought processes and to facilitate discussion between students and with teachers. At least in science teaching, the more recent evidence is of significant improvements in conceptual understanding.

Chapter 3, by Ray Burnstein and Leon Lederman, describes a ten-year period of developing the uses of a wireless ARS in lectures, transforming a passive student experience into classroom interactivity. Chapter 4 (by Harold Horowitz) is based on his 25-year experience of ARSs. After a description of early experiments, in which students were more positive about the ARS than were the teachers, he gives a history of the technological development. He ends with advice on question design, which other authors also provide.

The remaining twenty chapters are varied and, to a greater or lesser extent, are case studies based on local experience over a shorter period than in Section 1. They involve many subject areas, from law to maths to medicine. Words that recur prominently include motivation, participation, activity, interaction, and engagement. There is often emphasis on pedagogy and evaluation. Readers will want to skim and sample what is most relevant to them. Chapter 13, by Penuel, Abrahamson and Roschelle, is unusual in that it develops a sociocultural theoretical framework that sees learning as a transformation of student participation in the class.

What can we make of all this? My own experience of using voting systems, both electronic and manual, is that it can transform the teaching-learning situation. An ARS opens up new possibilities for face-to-face teaching and learning in groups. Reflective teachers in HE have started exploring these possibilities: we can join them with the reassurance that others have often achieved positive results. Parts of this book provide a good introduction to the literature and to some tested pedagogical strategies. In the last ten years learning technology, or e-learning, has concentrated on on-line support and interactions, but many teachers and students want face-to-face contact. An ARS makes possible new types of communication in the classroom, just as online services do outside the classroom. ARS seems likely to become a significant tool in enhancing the face-to-face learning experience. We may one day wonder how we taught without one.

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This attractive new book is marked “Second edition” on the cover. Hardly. The changes in the text in the ten years since the first edition—called Technology, open learning and distance education—are far more than minor and cosmetic: in many regards, this is a new book. And it is an attractive new book, one that will cause your thoughts to be provoked and, after that, will be worth keeping on your audio-visual book shelf for many years of fruitful reference. Not on your e-learning shelf? No—despite the change in the title from open learning to e-learning, this is not primarily about e-learning so shouldn’t go on that shelf. In much the same way, don’t put this book with your others on distance learning.

Of course, it’s quite likely you no longer have an audio-visual shelf—in the last decade, so called multimedia has taken over from what audio-visual folk used to call multimedia and now have to call multiple media. And, in many contexts well considered in this book, individualised, independent learning has made great strides against whole-class learning facilitated by a live teacher in the same room.

There is no doubt that many kinds of people can learn effectively working on their own with good IT links to good multimedia and other...
learning resources. They can do this as effectively as in a human classroom, sometimes even more effectively than that. However, there are many ifs and buts hidden in those two sentences, and Tony Bates goes a long way in exposing, and then dealing with, those ifs and buts. As a result, his book is a hugely important coverage of what Alex Romiszowski called “The selection and use of instructional media” (title of his classic, best seller for decades: 400 pages in the 1988 edition). There is a subtle but crucial difference, however—Romi expected the classroom-bound teacher to select the most appropriate media for a task, whereas Tony tends to expect the course designer to select the most appropriate media for a course. In other words, the former approach tries to match AV and IT resources to specific learning objectives, while the latter looks to match IT (and, within that, multimedia) resources to course aims (general objectives). The result of that latter approach too often means “all the learners have access to such-and-such, so we must use such-and-such like this in every learning unit”—what many of us are coming to call “death by a thousand PowerPoints”.

At the other end of the IT-based distance learning process—if what should be a cyclic process has an end—is, of course, evaluation of effectiveness. If, while ever so humble, have another quarrel with Bates’s wonderful book, it is that we don’t find here any attempt to set out how to assess the appropriateness of the media against given learning needs.

Enough of what Technology, e-learning and distance education isn’t. As far as it goes, this book is indeed excellent and hugely important; the writing is beautiful too. It opens with a painless preface and three scene-setting chapters; their titles are entirely helpful and valid: “Emerging trends: convergence and specialisation in distance education”, “The impact of technology on the organisation of distance education” and “Selecting and using [yes, sic!] technologies in distance education”. There are then seven deep and thoughtful chapters on the proper use of broad teaching/learning groups of media: print, video, and audio, and then four mainly to do with approaches based on the newer information technologies (with “Web” in all four titles). Some will argue about the balance in practice (for instance, I am working on a country-wide distance learning project based on broadcast radio), but we do still have the rest of the audio-visual shelf to fall back on if need be.

Oh, yes, and then there are

- Chapter 11 (“What have we learned”)—a very good collation of thoughts based on the decision-making criteria of Access, Costs, Teaching/learning, Interactivity, Organisation, Novelty, and Speed (of introduction) followed by “twelve golden rules” for the use of technology for learning
- an appendix on the relevant characteristics of (broadcast) video and radio, just as good now as when Bates first published it over twenty years ago
- seven pages of bibliography (including, alas, few references to electronic sources)
- a wonderful (but unchecked by me) ten-page index

If BJET had annual lists (for instance) of the year’s best book in our field and of essential reading for our holidays, Technology, e-learning and distance education would have my whole-hearted vote in each case.

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www.greenwood.com\praeger

In reading Higher education in the internet age, I was struck by how informative this easily readable book is. It builds on previous work about the information age and the nexus between libraries and learning. Each chapter deals succinctly with a major issue facing higher education across the globe. Many of the issues can equally be applied to the K-12 realm and, indeed, to any training or adult education setting. Although some chapters are more particularly for those in libraries, any academic or teacher will find much of interest concerning how we can induce effective information literacy in our students, how we can plan for electronic information retrieval and effective
usage, and how libraries will continue to make a difference in the information age.

The book fulfills the authors’ aims (as stated in the Preface) to encourage “campus leaders to make better use of their academic libraries... [and to]... use their campus libraries as a strategic resource”. The move from paper-based to electronic information systems has huge implications for learning, teaching, institutional identity and legislative action. The authors tackle many of these complex issues well in their approach to unpacking the impact of the internet age on teaching and learning.

The book’s layout encourages the reader to “dip into and out of” areas of interest within the broad chapter contexts—so it will be a well used and useful reference for many teachers with an interest in information literacy and the information society.

Much of the discussion on pedagogy captures the essence of the broader student-centred trends in the higher education and more general education literature; thus it is an holistic treatment of the issues rather than an isolated analysis of libraries and the internet.

Throughout the book there is a realistic treatment of complex issues such as the

- blessings and consequences of the copious amount of information increasingly available to staff and students;
- funding and policy dilemmas for institutions and education systems;
- lamentable slowness of academia to recognise the significant changes in library resources and to take advantage of the impact of information technology on learning;
- potential for libraries to be integrated with institutional IT infrastructure and resources;
- pros and cons of the “Google” approach; and
- need for institutional leadership and foresight.

The straight-talking approach and clear thinking debate in this book make it refreshing as well as informative.

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Bryan and Clegg bring together a diverse range of case studies describing assessment innovations in higher education in an attempt to combine scholarship and pragmatism. They provide theoretical background via a conceptual framework, which they then use as guiding principle for the case studies they present.

The book starts with a section on the pedagogic context of assessment innovation, followed by the three sections with the case studies. The first two chapters (written by Graham Gibbs) provide a conceptual framework containing eleven conditions for assessment to support learning. Interestingly, the first chapter is devoted to the challenges facing current assessment innovations, focusing on practical barriers such as increased student numbers, existing reward structures and the political agenda. This chapter sets the tone of the book, namely to illustrate practical examples of assessment innovations in higher education. Other interesting topics touched upon are peer review, making assessments accessible and adaptable for use in other institutions, and linking technology-supported forms of assessment to principles of good feedback practice in order to illustrate how on-line assessments can support feedback and self-regulated learning.

The case studies are divided into those three sections: (1) implementing feedback, (2) stimulating learning, and (3) encouraging professional development. Though it is not always clear why a specific one appears in a specific section, the studies are interesting and well written. The authors reflect on assessment development and implementation in their institutions and evaluate the implementations with regard to such aspects as desired learning outcomes, student perceptions, and/or staff experiences. Since the studies cover a wide range of purposes, forms, and educational contexts, it is difficult to give an overview or to recommend individual ones. Most studies involve assessment in a “traditional” university, though two are specific to distance education and a number might be suitable for it (eg,
e-portfolios). Finally, two case studies go more deeply into staff development and academic professionalism.

Although the case studies are interesting from a practical point of view, it is not always clear how they fit within the conceptual framework described in the first chapters—and to do this was the aim of the book! On the other hand, the mismatch could stimulate readers to do this themselves. A more general problem is the terminology used. It is not clear, for example, whether the authors see a difference between formative assessment and feedback, which tend to melt into one another. While the first chapters promulgate formative assessment (eg, focus on learning instead of on marks), the case studies present assessments that are summative for the students.

In short, this book offers interesting practical examples of assessment innovation. All readers will no doubt find interesting case studies that can be applied to their own context. The clear description of the context along with promoting and hindering factors encountered will certainly help others design and implement their own assessment innovations.

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Teaching and learning English literature is the latest volume in “Teaching and learning the humanities in higher education”, a series aimed at both early career and experienced teachers which deals with “all aspects of teaching individual arts and humanities subjects in higher education”.

The training undertaken by tutors in higher education in most parts of the English-speaking world has, at least until recently, primarily centred on the acquisition of knowledge of and qualifications in particular subject areas. Understanding of good pedagogical practices, knowledge of ways to develop and implement curriculum, and skills in how to select teaching strategies are still often neglected.

To what extent does Teaching and learning English literature help to fill this gap? There is no doubt that the authors are well versed in both the subject of English literature and in the issues involved in its effective teaching and learning. Their theoretical overviews of literature and its history as a subject are sound; their knowledge of the subject as it is prescribed and taught in the UK, Australia, North America and elsewhere is up-to-date; and their understanding of the scope and significance of pedagogical and curriculum concerns is authoritative. However, when it comes to providing practical advice about how to steer a course through the maze of different approaches that can be made to teaching literature at the tertiary level, the book tends to overwhelm the reader with an excessive proliferation of conceptual mapping and pedagogical suggestion.

Although the authors claim teachers are interested in how IT may be used to improve the teaching of literature there seems to be a mild distrust of technologies lurking behind much of what is suggested. When technologies are discussed (which is hardly at all), they are viewed mainly as a way of storing resources or for communicating—a narrow approach that leaves much out of account. Similarly, the list of websites appended at the end of the text is mainly confined to sites for institutions or projects—useful addresses, but not likely to spark new approaches to the teaching of English literature.

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This book derives from the Kaleidoscope Workshop (held in Lisbon, Portugal, June 2005) on “narrative learning environments” (nle), and provides readers with a range of snapshots showing how narrative might support learning through electronic media.

At first glance, not being familiar with the editors, I was re-assured by the Kaleidoscope icon on the front cover—Kaleidoscope being a recently founded European “network of excellence” in learning technology. The website’s nle pages are typically well stocked—see www.noe-kaleidoscope.org/nle.

After the brief introduction, Ruth Aylett ably delineates and critically appraises the role of digital stories in learning. Eight chapters then focus on particular applications of digital narratives. It is hard to summarise the breadth of these. Some are based on primary school work, another is about museum visits. Some are interactive “closed worlds”; others are open design tools. Some are expansive multimedia projects; others are the subjects of insightful small-scale research. Some are expansive multimedia projects; others are the subjects of insightful small-scale research. In the case of student generated narrative, some authoring environments are free and simple, like www.dfilm.com; others are expensive and feature rich, like Camtasia Studio (single user licence—$299). Some nles use traditional branching scripts to simulate and constrain narrative flow; others are more ambitious, using “unscripted autonomous agents”, like www.Victec.org.

De Vries promotes reflective narration by using email to raise students’ awareness of their audience. In contrast, Timcenko shows how narrative can provide affecive support and inspiration for new LEGO designers everywhere.

The book draws to a conclusion with two chapters suggesting methods of evaluating narrative aspects of learning environments, and finishes with a reflective piece by Carola Conle.

This is a timely publication since narrative and its role in learning have received considerable attention in recent years. The emergent nature of this field and the exploratory approach of the book are evident from the lack of much by way of evaluation. Many chapters are working papers and are not ready to provide evidence of their nles’ worth in the wild. Perhaps this will be addressed if the second such workshop (June 2006) also results in a book. Even one of the two evaluation chapters can only describe the development of a method that is itself too nascent for anything more concrete (Laaskolahti’s Sensual Evaluation Instrument). But this is the nature of reporting at the “bleeding edge”. While it makes for fascinating copy, one is left to wonder how many of these projects will be around in five or even two years’ time, especially if the funding dries up. Media rich environments are expensive to develop and then maintain, due in part to the way that design and media fashions age so rapidly. It would be easy to accuse researchers in this field of riding a kind of learning technology gravy-train, constantly hopping to the next new thing without ever having to investigate or evaluate any of it thoroughly.

Predicting this line of scepticism, Conle’s concluding chapter defends the editors and authors: their primary concern is with “narrative environments and the educational possibilities technological advances open up” (p 143). This strikes me as fair if slightly disingenuous. Apart from something as generic as email (De Vries’s Chapter 4) or a digital voice recorder (Walker’s Chapter 9), most of the software platforms upon which those “educational possibilities” are based are certain to change, become superseded, or just simply vanish. Furthermore, trying to focus on a limited range of a technology’s affordances is prone to the instantiation effects implied by Jones (2002): “The range of capacities that technologies have [is] constituted finally when they are mobilised in use.” This is apparent in Chapter 8; here one pair of students fully exploited the movie editing program’s affordances, while the other pair almost completely ignored them. Thus, perhaps because the book is aiming at something of a moving target, it will raise many new issues for its readers.

In summary, this small volume is rich, stimulating and useful, offering plenty of provoked thought for learning technology’s research and its practitioner communities.


As part of the Commonwealth of Learning’s World review of distance education and open learning series, Volume 6, Strategies for sustainable open and distance learning is an interesting and timely work. Its authors join a list of well known and experienced educators and researchers who offer clear and often very practical guidelines on a range of issues within the main topic of open and distance learning.

Since the late 1990s it has been my experience working at three Canadian universities (and in consulting with numerous others), that academia struggles not only with distance and open learning (as it is often tagged to a more traditional institution), but continues to struggle with how to maintain the system once they embark on the journey. This book, as the editors note “...is about implementing plans for systems of open and distance learning but, importantly it is also about ensuring that such implementation will be operationally sustainable” (p 1).

The book is organised into eight chapters, each being a collaborative effort. Each begins with a short introduction, written by the chapter author(s) followed by two or three case studies specific to the chapter theme produced by case study writers; this is followed by an analysis of the case studies within the context of the chapter theme. The chapters cover such topics as policy, planning, managing change, teaching / learning / student support, systems management, strategic alliances, quality issues, and costing such sustainability—and are written about very different institutions and situations, located around the world—including Africa, Australia, North America and Asia.

Full versions of the case studies are supposed to be available online at: http://www.col.org/worldreview/volume6.htm; however, when I looked, the site page was down. But in a quick visit to the COL site I found them and you can review them here: http://www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/3351 (the studies download as pdf files).

The advice and experience offered by this book’s contributors show us that open and distance learning are both possible and sustainable (although rarely smooth). If you or your institution is planning on embarking on this path, you might want to take this book along to help guide your way.

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Carey Jewitt is well known for her work in this area and her book provides a great insight into her thinking and her theoretical framing of her research. The work is structured in eight chapters and provides a gentle and well explicated walk through several of the projects she has undertaken at the Institute of Education, University of London. As she explains in the opening line her thoughts are on this question: “what real difference can the use of new technology make for learning?” The first stage is the recognition of the problems of technology use in classrooms, let alone integration into the work practices of the teachers. She places this book as a link between activity theory and the work of Kress and his colleagues on multimodality. Activity theory provides a useful lens for examining what transactions are occurring in the classroom and what impact each tool has on the learning outcomes. Her dominant themes in the early chapters are the focus on schools, through the curriculum, learning, literacy and pedagogy—and her analytical
framework which focuses on multimodality of the technologies, how they provide complex structure and links, and how they represent and display ideas and concepts.

Her second chapter explores aspects of the multimodality theory, modes and the nature of semiotic resources. In this framing, she stays clearly within the literary tradition although acknowledging the socio-cultural aspects of the technology within the learning environment. It might have also been interesting to link the discussion around multimedia and technology with the work in psychology around the ideas of cognitive load—but this might be for later exploration.

Jewitt’s third chapter explores in detail her approach to data collection. Again it stays within the literacy traditions: however, one aspect did concern me in her categorisation (while understandable): the separation of gaze from movement and gesture. Here it would seem that some of the work in eye studies on focus might also be relevant. The impact of the structuring and representation that a technology brings is explored in the fourth chapter where one particular cd-rom product is analysed to emphasise the way in which a technology reshapes the characters and their importance in the telling of a story. In a sense, it is the traditional tension between the film and the book: what is emphasised and what is downplayed in each form.

I particularly enjoyed the fifth and sixth chapters where Jewitt explores in rich detail multimodal learning; here she provides many examples of the way the technologies mediate the complex process of internalisation. She explores a range of discipline areas in this analysis, demonstrating the complex interplay between representation and language. She identifies the problems of several learning activities where “traditional language” is not produced as part of the learning process. Instead the artefacts are such that there may be a disconnection between the discipline discourses and the learning activities. One small concern is the problem of using precise language for metaphorically related ideas. Jewitt refers to the visual linkage between elements in the display as a “vector”—choosing to use a precise mathematical concept to describe a relationship (and one which, it is claimed, is often diagonal, just diluting existing discipline based meanings). This often happens in the classroom and we are left with learners not understanding when words are used precisely and when they are being used in a more discursive way. A quick example is the word “average”—how much its meaning changes between Maths and English classrooms!

The seventh chapter takes the integrating theme of pedagogy as design, which provides a useful context for both teacher and learner: now Jewitt explores how technologies change the nature of the pedagogy. Whether it be cd-rom or interactive whiteboard, science or literature, the nature of the experience for each player within the environment is changed and his/her understanding of the multiple literacies required to make meaning causes a rethinking of the pedagogy. Thus Jewitt concludes an insightful and pleasurable journey that should be required reading for people working at the social intersection of learning, curriculum disciplines and technologies.

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I found this book disturbing. It raises issues which I judged truly concerning, and which I was ashamed to realise had escaped my proper consideration before I met them in these pages. I suspect that, if you are committed to the development of e-learning in higher education, you will find much in here to disturb your thinking—to good effect. For that reason, I commend Education in cyberspace to you, heartily.

The editors tell us that the essays in this volume originated from a small international gathering held in 2002. The purpose at that time was to go beyond the predominantly pragmatic writings, focused on technical and operational issues in e-learning, and on eval-
uator research, and to concentrate on broader social, cultural and theoretical aspects. The outcome is a really good read. The editors have carefully managed to avoid obvious discontinuities between writers and coverage, and to prompt much valuable thinking on the part of readers. That is so, even four years after the conference at which the issues written about were first aired—for the text has not obviously dated; that in itself is a compliment to the quality of the thinking in an area where much writing can rapidly go out of date.

Pelletier opens with a forceful and persuasive argument for us all to consider the ideological decisions which a university should make, and sometimes only implicitly does make, when it decides on its mode of engagement with new technologies in learning. Bayne follows with a powerfully allegoric chapter in which she probes deeply the modes of identity formulation amongst learners and teachers in the vle, which certainly already causes some unease for those who have examined the nature of their on-line interactions.

There follows a trio of papers which raise issues about the impact of the new technologies on the very nature of higher education and its processes. Ingraham introduces the notion of alternative scholarly forms which are emerging; Poster suggests persuasively that the new media age will radically alter not only the content and presentation of our disciplines, but will challenge their fundamental epistemological assumptions; and Oliver explores, as an example of change, the impact of the use of metadata in marginalising the role of the academic and almost denying educational diversity.

In the next section, the emphasis switches to the environment, and to the virtual audience within it. Ravenscroft suggests a framework for learning derived from his consideration of theories of learning, discourse analysis and dialogue modelling techniques. Cousin questions as unhelpful the commonly drawn distinction between pedagogy and the environment, and argues that we cannot afford to regard technologies as “mere instruments”, since they are constitutive of our identities. Jones stresses the importance of socially situated theories of learning, in view of the increasing unknowability of students’ learning experiences and of contexts online. And McKenna sets the scene for all of this by drawing on the notion of language as a territory shared by sender and recipient.

The editors close with their own contributions, which add to the reader’s agenda of items for consideration. Land wrestles for us with the issues of embodiment and attendant risks in the virtual environment, and, together with Bayne, then deals with the potential and dangers of the surveillance of contributions and contributors which is possible in the virtual environment.

This is a book which frankly sets out to prompt us to think carefully, and in depth, about the reasons that the advent of the new technologies should impel us to consider thoughtfully that education needs, or at least is now tending to need, to take a different form. It is a book which—in the best sense of the word—disturbs me. Indeed, I felt left with so much to think about after my first reading, that I procrastinated over this review, set the volume aside, and returned to it for a second time, expecting that my reactions would then have settled down... but they hadn’t. Indeed, this careful summary of what we can find in this book has only been written after a third and further delayed reading.

There, in a sense, is my recommendation to you. If you would think ever more deeply about the issues which the new technologies are generating for higher education, then buy this book, expect to be disturbed by it, and to return to it to re-read, and then to re-read again. If you are not so inclined, then borrow the book—and expect to be provoked to think more deeply!

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This textbook covers what many students find a difficult topic. It is intended for use to support a taught course in intermediate statistics, for which students will have a mainstream text. The writers’ aim is to make it possible for students to learn to use SPSS, from various levels of pre-requisite knowledge and understanding, and at varying rates—without the need for a formal, instructional computer lab programme. That aim they achieve, in my judgement—provided, of course, students have access to Windows and SPSS for Windows.

The text
• is clearly written and attractively printed,
• includes suitable reminders of mainline theory,
• provides step by step instructions for conducting analyses using SPSS,
• is extremely well illustrated with annotated outputs, and
• offers adequate guidance on choosing the appropriate statistic for a given research design.

A feature of the composition is that readers are provided with a complete set of imaginary data, on a CD, which they use for the exercises, and whose expected outputs are reproduced in the text itself. As a supplemental resource, the book contains in an appendix a quick reference guide to SPSS; most people who are only occasional users of the software will welcome this, when they return next time to use the software again.

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This text is a guide for undergraduates giving presentations in class alone, or in groups. The text is highly readable, is full of sound advice, and contains a number of valuable exercises not found in similar works. Nonetheless, as it comes in a series that includes Sail through exams! and Write great essays! I wonder how useful such books really are.

Here, in terms of educational technology, for example, PowerPoint presentations hardly get a look in. It seems to be assumed that students know how to create them. The main advice given is that, to avoid embarrassment, students should ensure that they know how to switch the system on before they start. There is no discussion of how to prepare a PowerPoint presentation and what this does to one’s thinking compared with, say, preparing a conventional handout (eg, see Kinchin, 2006), or writing on a whiteboard.

Bland and comforting, the authors never debate any of the issues discussed. Readers are told for example to “Make sure your handout looks good. It should be neat and tidy.” But there are no examples of good handouts, and precious little discussion of the underlying craft required to make a handout “look good”. Nor is anything said about the presentation of tables and graphs—crucial components of many presentations.

There must be at least half-a-dozen books of this kind currently available. Most of them are written for academics rather than students, so this particular text scores in this regard. Perfect presentations is student friendly, but students might learn more from a similar text by Platow (2002).


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The market for learning in the virtual environment—ie “e-learning”—has developed very fast over the last few years. As e-learning opportunities continue to grow quantitatively, teaching and learning in the virtual environment too mature from their infancy of lecture-notes oriented instructional web pages to learning in groups through the development of learning communities in a constructivist framework. This book is a classic example of the maturation of the pedagogy of e-learning.

McConnell offers us eight chapters (after a brief introduction that sets the background of the book, including the research approaches taken and explanation of the basic premise used). The presentation of concepts takes the form of analytical description and critical reflection based on theory grounded in practice. His book critically looks into the processes of community building and learning in groups in an online environment.

In Chapter 1 we are introduced to “collaborative e-learning and learning communities”. Here the author differentiates between “learning community” and “community of practice”. While the former is a cohesive group that embodies a culture of learning, the latter’s focus is on the development of professional practice. Chapter 2 presents the design of networked e-learning groups of MEd students in e-learning. The author shares the students’ experiences of e-learning groups and communities in Chapter 3, gathered through a questionnaire-based survey.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on assessment in the virtual environment and assessment of group work. As e-learning matures, the issue of assessment becomes ever more important to maintain credibility of the system. In this context, McConnell presents us with the self-peer-tutor assessment approach in e-learning groups. This approach is quite useful in dealing with higher order skills, particularly when the focus is on collaboration and not competition.

Chapter 6 presents a case study of distributed problem solving in a learning community, and explains how groups develop in the virtual environment. In Chapter 7, McConnell discusses the group dynamics of e-learning groups. It shows us the complex nature of group activities in e-learning, particularly because of lack of physical presence of the members. It explores the issues related to identity, communication, harmony, conflict and control. The e-learning groups also show complex learning processes adopted by them, particularly because of the open, flexible, and reflective learning environment that allows opportunity to form its own group, identify authentic problems, and discuss and solve these through collaborative approaches. In Chapter 8, the author summarises the learning experiences in this research into e-learning groups.

The book is a good example of qualitative research in on-line learning. Its basis is the premise that e-learning is good if modelled around constructivist thinking. The role of teacher changes in such a situation from a “sage on the stage” to a “guide on the side” who facilitates learning and plays the role of co-participant in the construction of knowledge or knowledge building. While the design of participatory learning is quite useful, the book also leaves certain questions for the readers to think and seek answers about:

- What is the right kind of blending for synchronous and asynchronous communication in building a learning community?
- To what extent should the tutor intervene in the group activities?
- What is the right size of a group in e-learning to be effective?
- Does presence of proactive / enthusiastic students in a group affect decisions, thereby reducing the learning potential?
- How can we reduce competition, personality clash and anxiety in self-selecting e-groups?

Though the book leaves us with many questions to think about, I would like to recommend it strongly to every teacher who is currently involved in e-learning or wants to become immersed in e-learning in future.

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This edited collection sets out to examine the “new textual landscapes” of young children’s lives and, in particular, the new media and popular culture texts which now abound in contemporary childhood. As such, the book’s strengths are two-fold. First, it has a predominant focus on children aged 0 to 5 years—certainly an under-represented group of technology users in the existing research literature. Second, the book’s thirteen chapters span an impressive range of new media and popular culture, encompassing computers, the internet, computer and video games, television programmes, mobile telephony, children’s magazines, toys, movies, and the Pokemón phenomenon. This breadth of focus allows the book’s contributors to paint a convincing picture of how contemporary childhoods are shaped by—and themselves shape—the changing communicative practices of the twenty-first century.

The book is based around three themes: “changing childhood cultures”; “children and technologies”; and “transformative pedagogies”, with many chapters highlighting the role of play and other “informal” uses of media that lead to learning. Although there are many interesting chapters, the theme of “transformative pedagogies” is perhaps the most useful, providing a thoughtful discussion of how educators can make best use of the media-related “funds of knowledge” which children bring into educational settings. Although not providing a neat manifesto for change, these chapters do lead to a set of useful recommendations—such as designing early years curricula which are meaningful and engaging, fostering a genuine commitment amongst educators to working with parents and caregivers, and altering pedagogies to allow children to produce as well as consume digital content.

Although it’s engaging, the book’s claim to be a “seminal” and “ground-breaking” text written by an “unmatchable team of international experts” is somewhat disingenuous. The book re-visits a lot of old ground already ably covered by more seminal academics such as the New London Group (in particular Kress and Gee), Street, Buckingham, Lankshear and Knoebel. As with many books, “international” is a relative term—here taken to mean authors from England, Australia, Canada, the US and one chapter each from Italy and Mexico. Given the book’s central premise that children create their own, child-centred cultural practices, then it would seem obvious that research of this type reaches beyond developed countries (and especially English-speaking developed countries). Indeed, the cultural diversity of children’s popular cultures and new media practices is hinted at in Kenner’s chapter looking at bilingual children from Chinese, Egyptian, Turkish and Indian families living in England. As such, the book is hardly the final authoritative word on early childhood and digital literacy. Nevertheless, it provides an interesting starting point for future research and certainly plugs a gap in a field which often mistakenly equates “children” with school-aged children.

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This edited volume was compiled in honour of M David Merrill by distinguished scholars from the instructional design and technology research and development community who have benefited from his mentoring. Drawing on the contributions made by Merrill to instructional design, its chapters document innovative work, ideas and practices in instructional technology. These innovations are in the areas of: learning objects and the notion of reusable components; fundamental aspects of learning and the design of instruction; assessment; evaluation and model validation; theories of learning and instruction; and instructional design practice—mirroring Merrill’s diverse contributions to the field.

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Learning objects and their reusability are discussed in the first four chapters—with Wiley arguing for the reconceptualisation of learning objects to be more useful for teachers; Ton de Jong and colleagues describing a simulation authoring system that re-uses learning objects in science and mathematics classrooms; Kinshuk and colleagues building the Cognitive Triat Model to support the dynamic construction of learning objects for more individualised learning; and Van Merriënboer and colleagues suggesting an integrative approach that stresses customising intermediate or partially complete objects for local situations.

These are followed by three chapters on the fundamental aspects of learning and instructional design—with Seel presenting a model-centred approach that is supported by evidence for the design of learning environments; Jonassen arguing for problem-centred instruction and how the three kinds of problem-solving require different kinds of instructional support; and Gibbons extending the discussion of both these approaches to the notion of a principled design language for instructional design.

In keeping with Merrill’s tradition of instructional design’s being an evidence-based enterprise, the next three chapters focus on innovations in assessment and evaluation. Marshall and colleagues assess the acquisition of teamwork skills derived from Merrill’s first principles of instruction; Foshay and Quinn discuss design science as an enterprise involving different kinds of evaluation; and Richey identifies and discusses five different validation processes for instructional design and development models.

The next three chapters move on to discussions of theories of learning and instruction. Here Dijkstra links cognition and design and how the conception of various objects may be integrated into a problem-based instructional design model; Reigeluth argues for performance support systems and personal tutor systems to be seamlessly integrated into the work environment; and Tennyson shows how Dijkstra’s linking model can be used to derive the various approaches to instruction.

There are then four chapters that involve different kinds of conversation about the nature of instructional design. Wilson argues in favour of an inclusive approach to instructional design: L’Allier makes Wilson’s discussion concrete in terms of his own development; Rossett and Papaila discuss why instructional design practitioners receive less than adequate recognition; and Van Schaack and Ohrazda interview Merrill on the topic of mentoring. The basis of the final chapter of the book is the special presidential session at the annual meeting of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology in October 2003 in Anaheim—here Merrill was questioned by a panel about his body of research and development over the years.

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Also received
Please note that mention here does not preclude later fuller review.

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This lovely and invaluable book deals with enlivening the teaching and learning of, and with, IT throughout the age range of compulsory schooling (5–16 in the UK). The authors appear as “The Learning Discovery Centre Team”. But what does that name mean? Despite the undoubted quality of their product (even overcoming the apparently over-ambitious brief given in our first sentence), one must feel a little uneasy about such an attribution, especially in the case of a publisher with highly regarded authors.

In any event, the book, sub-titled “Using new tools for learning”, is good—it is full of bright ideas (many being novel, in this context at least), attractive, well illustrated, well supplied with notes and references, and provided with an excellent index. How does it work? It works by giving us a very comprehensive survey of technological teaching and learning techniques, lightly adding any necessary background and instructions for each, and then
offering a number of quick case studies to show each one in practice. The “Creative” in the book’s title links to creativity in education, which has had a big push in Britain for several years, and is shown very well by this approach.

Your reviewer’s hobby horse in this context is Britain’s spending vast amounts of money on interactive white boards (iwbs)—in some places there’s one in every classroom, but very rarely are they well used (especially in post-primary education). What does this book have to say about them? Absolutely nothing... how telling. Actually, there is a tiny mention—on Page 41—that linking a wireless tablet PC to a wireless data projector is much better, and cheaper, than having an iwb. That is so true: classrooms, for any subject and any age, working like this with a tablet machine can be creative indeed.

Every school’s IT coordinator should have a copy of this book, and study it.

tandf.co.uk enquiry@tandf.co.uk

Educating young people whose homes are in other countries has long been a big industry in the UK, and British schooling—often in the independent sector followed by Oxbridge—has had a great influence on the development of many parts of the world. We are now in a very different situation, however—the number of such guests has increased hugely while proportionately more and more come from non-aristocratic homes in which English is not spoken, and from cultures in which the British approach to education is alien. British state as well as independent (private) schools have to struggle with all this now, as do colleges of further education and all universities other than the best known few. In most educational sectors, the problems are being overcome very well, for one reason or another, and the many thousand students (from, for instance, all over mainland China and what we used to call Central and Eastern Europe) are integrating well, gaining fast in English language skills, and learning hard and successfully. Perhaps the one sector where there are still big problems consists of the top universities apart from Oxbridge—blood curdling tales come from there about people who never learn English at uni, never meet a tutor, never find out what their courses are about, never mix with people from other cultures than their own, and pay a lot of money for an experience which gives them nothing but a weak but undeserved degree and a deep dislike of this country.

Sub-titled “Improving learning for all” (and part of the publisher’s “Staff and educational development” series), Teaching international students is an interesting book that addresses very well a number of the issues raised in the above tirade. It concentrates on higher education (within which, recall, the main problems lie, in UK at least) and offers a number of relevant papers written generally from a cross-cultural viewpoint. Most of the contributors whose locations are clear work in UK or Australia—two countries whose international students make up 10-15% of the student body—though there is also an invaluable paper on cultural knowledge from Kam Louie of Hong Kong (until recently, source for the UK of very many highly successful students). Almost all the papers are very relevant and readable—but the first one sticks most in your reviewer’s mind: “Canaries in the coal mine” by Janette Ryan (Oz) and Jude Carroll (UK). It reflects aspects of that tirade, emphasises the need for major changes in thinking and approach, and insists (as with the book’s sub-title) that making teaching and learning better for students from elsewhere will much improve the university experience of the natives. We all need that.

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We have been hearing about lifelong learning for years, and (as learning facilitators) have doubtless been applauding for years our Governments’ grand plans towards lifelong learning for all. Of course, British Government plans in this direction are not much different from those of many other governments around the world.
Yet, despite all that fuss and all those grand plans, there doesn’t seem to have been much, well, progress, does there? And, again, the British lack of real progress is not much different from experience elsewhere.

Prof Field is Director of Academic Innovation and Continuing Education at Stirling University in Scotland; this is the second, revised, edition of a book that first appeared in 2000. Since the time of the first edition, Britons have heard yet more about its subject and been faced with yet more grand plans (though still little progress). As a result, perhaps, more (if not most) of us now accept that formal schooling for youngsters—however good and appropriate that may or may not be—is not sufficient, so that more formal systems need to develop to meet the learning needs of post-education people.

Prof Field’s book cuts through the undergrowth of the lifelong learning forest to expose the trees of potential future sustainability and the shoots of potential future undergrowth problems. What is important is not so much the “new educational order” of the title (which seems to mean, if anything, the trend towards inclusive, individualised, self-directed learning)—rather we need a new order of political economy in this regard, not least an acceptance that “lifelong learning” should be much more than vocational re-training.

If you believe at all that channelling post-formal-education learning is worth doing, read this book.


Over the last decade, much of the work of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) of England and Wales (now the Training and Development Agency for Schools, TDA) has been to rationalise, quantify and focus the initial training and development of people working in state education and their subsequent in-service training and development for higher roles. Some of what they have produced has been amazingly successful... and some has been er less so. Less so are the standards for staff up to the level of middle management. This book, “A key to school improvement”, tries to put the standards into context, into real English, and into practice. This is not easy, the standards not being smart evaluation criteria, but Green makes a good attempt to explain and apply. This is including by way of the various other lists of quality measures in use in England and Wales (and, to an extent, elsewhere), such as school inspection criteria, the characteristics of advanced skills teachers, and the metristicks used to assess potential head teachers (school principals).

This is an important book, in that it addresses important matters in a way that could help schools improve. But it is not inspiring reading, even for initial and in-service teacher trainers in England and Wales. Readers from elsewhere prepared to pay out a lot of money will find it is not at all generic either.


The usual meaning of “blended learning” is the use of courses with mixed on-line and face-to-face components; that is the sense in which Dr Macdonald (Open University in Scotland) mainly uses the term. She is right to observe that some people use it to mean a mix of synchronous and asynchronous, and that others use different terms for the same concept(s). This is a tortuous area and Macdonald rightly expends a lot of ink mapping it (though not trying to rationalise it). After that, her main theme (as the book’s title implies) is that “blended provision” must not sink into e-learning, purely individualised IT-based working—rather, very good support of the learners is crucial. Mind you, there are very many trad courses, in higher education in the main, where that message about learner support and guidance seems to have been forgotten in the race to minimise costs. Again, Macdonald’s title reminds us that one great strength of blended learning is that the support staff member is a “tutor”, not a “lecturer”.

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This is a very useful book on its subject, then, with that philosophy behind it. It too is a blend, and a very effective one—of relevant theory and the actual practice of being an online tutor. Apart from her invaluable scene setting Introduction, Macdonald gives us fourteen chapters in three broad groups (approaches, tutoring itself, and developing independent learners); as well as a long appendix with briefest details of and e-addresses for blended learning projects (almost all in higher education); a very good bibliography (including quite a few w-addresses); and a very good index.


This great book somehow escaped BJET’s notice until recently, and it first appeared in 1995—apologies for that! It is a “great” book, however, in the sense of being large rather than of being a classic-to-be. The sub-title tells us that it is an “Introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses”, and its Introduction in turn insists that the proper study of education kind is man: that to understand the contemporary (and, implied, future) curriculum one must pay full attention to the voices of individuals, even in the distant past. Well, yes—“the study of the past is the key to the present”, indeed, but can we really envisage many students of curriculum wading through the hundreds of academic and very well written but rather dry pages of this “textbook”?

Pinar and his fellows agonise over where to start their exploration, the task being made somewhat easier by their tendency to concentrate on the US (“we are Americans, not Europeans”, Page 863), and, within that, to the higher reaches of education. They do eventually start, in 1828—date of the appearance of the Yale report on the defense of the classics. A quarter of those hundreds of pages pass by before we reach the section on “Contemporary curriculum discourses 1980–1994”; that section offers ten more beautifully crafted chapters, with individual ones looking at such aspects as curriculum and gender or race, teachers or students. Each chapter (15 in all) closes with a conclusion section: a very good idea, but somewhat spoiled by the inclusion of plenty more new material in these sections (i.e. they do not generally conclude).

The book too concludes, with a twenty-page Conclusion (with its own not fully conclusive conclusion), and 250 pages of references and indexes. (The synoptic contents list at the front is very good for getting around, however.)

Reviews should offer conclusions too. This is a beautiful book to own and to dip into (as long as you accept that dipping may lead to an hour of linear browsing). But as a course text?—How could a course tutor assess its use by the learners?


The IB is an international qualification for students at the end of schooling (around Grade 12, Year 13, age 18). It has a lengthy history of almost four decades and is now available in nearly 2000 schools in over a hundred countries. Many of those countries (“even” Wales) have developed their own versions—however, the pattern remains the same, the contents do not vary greatly, and the philosophy is unchanged. Growing dissatisfaction with traditional courses for these young people—such as with the Advanced Level system in England and Wales—means that the IB has received a lot of interest in recent years. A great fillip in the UK was the recent news that universities looking at applicants would view it very favourably.

This book is therefore even more timely than some of its predecessors (including Pound’s 2003 book from the same publisher, which is rather more theoretical). It offers eight chapters from twelve experienced IB users (such as people in schools running the IB and those experienced in educational marketing, for instance). However, it does not offer a clear overview to those with little or no knowledge of IB in theory or in practice. There is nothing formal about the assessment of IB diplomates,
either (though assessment of specific courses gains some attention on occasion). On the other hand, if you work in a school where there are thoughts of moving to IB (or running it in parallel with existing post-16 courses), this book—in conjunction with www.ibo.org—will help you a lot.

**Somekh, Bridget** (2006) *Action research*  
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The author of this important book—Professor of Educational Research at Manchester’s Metropolitan University—is very well known in the field of action research. She is also well known in the field of managing educational change. Here she brings the two together, arguing cogently and succinctly that action research is well suited as a “methodology for change and development”.

In that action research is also a valuable implementation of the principles of educational technology—being designed explicitly to focus on educational problems revealed by proper needs assessment—*BJET* readers should find it particularly thought provoking. That is also so as Somekh doesn’t concentrate on action research in schools (though there’s plenty of great material about that)—she also looks at how the approach could help with HE organisational development and education-industry links. After all, generalisability gives validity to a research methodology as well as to a new approach to the management of change.

The book is easy to read, and also easy to refer to (the index is excellent); there is a very lengthy references section as well.

**Veugelers, Wiel & O’Hair, Mary John** (2005) *Network learning for educational change*  
openup.co.uk enquiries@openup.co.uk

This book’s Preface is rather over-filled with slogans, but you do need to hear about teachers being “the midwives of the knowledge society”. The book’s theme is that those midwives tend to be a bit isolated, yet learn best by talking together, planning together, and evaluating together—by focussed networking, in other words. What the editors have done is try to bring together accounts of successful academic networked learning communities to produce a basis for their own network shared with us to allow us to share their “promising directions and compelling examples”. (Of course, we all know—don’t we?—that it is just as important to include accounts of failures in collections such as these.)

The preface is rather over-filled with Americanisms and American spellings too, for a book published by the UK OU. However, rather under half the authors and editors are based in the US, so there is no great problem in this regard. On the other hand, although there are three parts to the book (theory and practice, starting a network, and networking networks), there are no editorial links between them or between the chapters—nothing to set each scene or to summarise the place of each contribution in the grand view of things. The index is detailed, so that helps readers a little to gain an overview.