

Reviews

Blackmore, Paul & Kandiko, Camille ed (2012) *Strategic curriculum change* Routledge (New York & London) ISBN 978-0-415-80934-4 217 pp £24.99 <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415809344/>

Summary

This book examines strategic curriculum change through a study of change activities within a group of international research-based universities. It echoes a range of concepts, processes and tools relevant to curriculum change by way of real world (even if occasionally rarefied) case studies from each of these institutions. The target readers include university leaders at all levels and academic curriculum developers.

Sara Hammer

Strategic curriculum change: Global trends in universities claims to deal with messy change-in-practice as well as the theoretical aspects of its subject. This is done by way of the examination of the real case studies that accompany the conceptual and theoretical discussion. The book has four parts, and focuses on a range of concepts, processes and tools that the writers claim apply to curriculum change.

Part 1 is “Curriculum coherence: Knowledge, relationships and networks”. It introduces conceptual tools and ideas such as curricular coherence and “the networked curriculum” to assist institutions in thinking about curriculum design and change. Its examination of its case study of a Brown University curriculum review is designed to test the coherence of their long standing “open curriculum” model. Change-in-practice is difficult to discern within the narrative of this case study; however, it does illustrate how the concept of “coherence” might help shape and re-invent a curriculum.

The second part is “Strategic curriculum structures and processes”. This incorporates ideas about the role played in the delivery of curriculum change by curricular organisation, desirable outcomes (or “characteristics”), and assessment. The case study here comes from Hong Kong University; it charts the transformation of their undergraduate curri-

culum from one with a traditional, discipline-based mastery focus to a capabilities framework with an emphasis on experiential learning. Heated debate and disagreements within the consultation and planning phases are hinted at but not described in any detail.

Part 3—“Enabling strategic change”—examines some processes, resources and people that help achieve strategic curriculum change. The University of Melbourne case study that comes with it emphasises the role of governance and leadership as part of a curriculum change stakeholder engagement process. This study *does* deliver on the editors’ core promise of telling us about change-in-practice: it examines challenges such as

- balancing the delivery of solid disciplinary foundations with the necessary breadth;
- managing new offerings while running down the teaching of old ones;
- philosophical opposition from some academic staff; and
- negative reporting in the Australian media.

The fourth part—“The networked curriculum”—contains a chapter called “The physical and virtual environment for learning”. Its authors argue that, whilst the use of modern techniques and tools for teaching and learning (such as IT-based ones) does not alone lead to curriculum transformation, their qualities can help to deliver a range of learning goals such as employability and engagement. The discussion is not extensive, which may be explained by the profile of the group of universities under study. Indeed Blackmore and Kandiko cite the findings of a survey conducted on the take-up of such techniques and tools by research-intensive universities, which showed that a lack of resourcing and a lack of experience on the part of academic staff have discouraged their use. However, they also cite factors helping to remove barriers that include learning space design and professional support.

This book does partly deliver on its promised focus on curriculum change in practice as well as in theory—but only partly. This is a pity.

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Burge, Elizabeth et al ed (2011) *Flexible pedagogy, flexible practice* Athabasca U Press (Edmonton, Canada) ISBN 978-1-926836-20-1 348 pp CDN\$34.95 (download free of charge)
<http://www.aupress.ca/index.php/books/120203>

Summary

In this excellently edited and stimulating book, targeted at all interested in post-secondary education, practitioners in the fields of flexible pedagogy and distance education across the globe share and critically reflect on experiences of flexibility grounded in the gritty reality of practice. If the content of this book is likely to be relevant to you, I recommend that you arrange to borrow a copy for a while.

Marie Martin

The genesis of *Flexible pedagogy, flexible practice* is fascinating and its content absorbing. The editors brought together thirty-three experienced practitioners from five continents in the field of flexible pedagogy and practice in post-secondary distance education. Their brief was to “pull the reader right into the heat of action” (p 201), then step back, reflect, and share their reflections as honestly as prudently possible. The result is this “gritty [book of] notes from the trenches” that unflinchingly describes unvarnished experiences and shares lessons the writers learned the hard way. Sometimes these accounts are poignant, such as when a practitioner finds that the “leading edge becomes the bleeding edge” (p 338).

Excellent editing makes the book very reader-friendly. According to the Introduction, one overarching question is its *raison d'être*: How challenging on “the rough terrains of practice” is the much lauded, but variously defined and ultimately fluid and dynamic, concept of “flexible learning”? Each of the five chapters grapples with this question from a variety of human and geographical perspectives and from a range of immersive experiences. The editors uniquely offer readers the opportunity to “flex” their own route through the sections and even suggest some possible itineraries. All routes lead from the starting point of clarifying the concept, through a range of paths leading to identifying drivers and restraining forces, debating the role of digital technologies and issues of equity and digital divides, to narrating and reflecting on “messy and confusing” real life experiences. These last include compromises and trade-offs. Provocative “contrarian” voices are raised to stimulate reframing our notion of pedagogy, without which technology will be used simply to

reproduce existing approaches to teaching and learning.

A number of signposts guide readers on their journey. These are in the form of an introduction at the start of each section serving as a map of the ground to be covered. At two significant points—at the middle and the end of each such journey—a meta-analysis provides a clear reminder of where we have been, encourages us to question what we have learned, and prompts us to explore yet other avenues of analysis and to ask still further questions.

Ultimately, this book is all about asking questions to stimulate critical thinking on the popular but “foggy” concept of flexibility in post-secondary education. The target audience comprises all interested or involved in learning at this level. This audience is well served by the book’s editors and chapter authors. As Frits Pannekoek states in his Preface, it would be “enormously instructive” for such an audience to reflect carefully on the content of this book, which “prods” us into re-thinking our approach to learning and managing learning in the post-secondary sector.

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Fenwick, Tara et al (2012) *Emerging approaches to educational research* Routledge (New York & London) ISBN 978-0-415-57092-3 215 pp £24.99
<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415570923/>

Summary

This book focuses on new approaches to educational research by offering novel perspectives to people interested in finding further paths; as such it assumes previous knowledge in the field. It is therefore suitable for experienced researchers who are already familiar with the issues and variables usually involved in research practices. If the book’s content is likely to be relevant to you, I advise that you will probably find only parts of it of interest or use.

Cristina Oddone

When I chose this book to review, I was probably misled by the title, which was quite promising in terms of providing insights into educational research that could be applied to a variety of contexts. I expected to find suggestions and ideas on

how to carry out such research and notes on means to collect and analyse the data that occur as a result.

Fenwick et al indeed focus on educational research, and offer new perspectives on it; nonetheless, the analysis is at a very theoretical level and most of the discussion centres around “sociomateriality”, in other words, on the inseparability between the material and the social in learning situations. See, for instance, <http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2012/54/>.

According to the authors, among the various perspectives that characterise the shift taking place within the social sciences, the “sociomaterial” needs special attention. They take for granted that the material world is actually embedded in social relations and human behaviour—thus sociomaterial studies may help to reveal the dynamics and connections among people operating in educational contexts. In a few words, this perspective maintains that there is a continuum between learners as subjects and the material objects that are involved in the learning paths; this implies that the latter somehow affect learning outcomes. Materials and artefacts are not to be seen as simple tools that learners and teachers use in educational contexts: rather they should be considered as factors that influence the teaching and learning process.

By introducing these new trends, the authors do not intend to replace or erase the results of earlier research; on the contrary, they aim to integrate previous research outcomes into these new developments and to call attention to the importance of sociomateriality in education. In order to achieve this, all the categories and subjects involved in educational settings are analysed and the authors identify four different “arenas” for discussion—complexity theory, cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), actor-network theory (ANT), and theories of spatiality.

Indeed, one of the weaknesses of this book is that, despite providing innovative views, it rests these mainly on difficult theories, definitions and concepts—and tends to lack practical examples and suggestions on how to conduct this kind of research. The book should have provided instances of real research contexts, as stated in its summary, but in fact there are just a few scattered examples from different fields and sectors at a very theoretical level. Even the section on the relationship between IT and learners introduces general concepts—such as cyberspace—without delving more deeply into them.

Another problem lies in the language which is at times very complex and specialised and therefore makes it difficult reading for novices and inexperienced researchers.

For all the above reasons, I would recommend this book only to people who are already familiar with research techniques and are interested in finding an alternative theoretical point of view on how to carry out research in educational contexts.

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Kidd, Terry T & Chen, Irene ed (2011) *Ubiquitous learning* IAP (Charlotte, NC & Eurospan, London) ISBN 978-1-61735-436-6 337 pp £41.95 (boards £77.95)

<http://www.infoagepub.com/products/ubiquitous-learning>

Summary

This book is a stimulating read. It aims to alert educators, particularly in higher education, to the potential of “ubiquitous learning”, and offers a range of practical suggestions and strategies for teaching in this emerging environment. If the content of this book could be relevant to you, I recommend you arrange to borrow a copy.

Marie Martin

As the editors state in the Preface, this book concerns learning in the 21st century. Specifically it is about ubiquitous learning (here, u-learning for short). The editors define this as the intersection of e-learning and mobile learning, as enabled by advances in IT, particularly in mobile devices. The underpinning theories are active learning and constructivism.

The book aims to alert educators to the possibilities and potential of engaging in this new concept of enabling learning at any time and in any place, including while on the move. It also aspires to arouse interest in and stimulate action planning to implement u-learning, particularly (but far from solely) in higher education.

The book comes from the US, but (unlike many others that do) offers *global* perspectives on u-learning; it also argues that, while local situations differ, trends point in the same direction around the world. Indeed, it brings together from across the globe a wide range of educators with experience in the field who offer diverse u-learning models and strategies that will help train and develop teachers, as well as managers, on university and college campuses in the vital relevant areas of pedagogy, course

design and educational technology. A caveat comes with this. It is that in these early days of u-learning, all the outlined concepts, strategies and examples are fluid—they will continue to evolve with the relentless advance of IT. The constant is that teaching and learning practices will continually be driven forward.

The book comes in three parts. Part I, with three chapters, provides an overview of u-learning and aims to push our thinking and challenge our assumptions. The six chapters of Part II provide case studies of how u-learning design and practice can transform the learning environment. Part III—the longest, with eight chapters—sees in the best of existing learning practice a preview of the future. It looks at what constitutes good teaching in a u-learning environment and offers case studies to demonstrate current innovative development of new IT-based tools and techniques to engage future students in interactive round-the-clock learning. From these new directions emerges a vision of an unstoppable move towards ubiquitous learning in a world where, faced with the endless challenge of change, we can, at the touch of a handheld device, learn what we want, how we want it, and when and where we need it. The editors seek to prepare us for that world—and to be comfortable in it.

This book is a stimulating read. Throughout there is a sense of urgency and enthusiasm that carries the reader along. However, it also manages to present a coherent and persuasive argument—because its basis is the reality of the on-going IT-driven challenges and opportunities that face us in education in this century. It offers practical suggestions and strategies for rising to these, based on research and on current good practice. The editors freely admit that it will demand great effort and much risk-taking to implement the u-learning environment that they support, but theirs is no doomsday scenario. They remain resolutely optimistic, assuring us that “we are close”!

While there may be a case for a more critical view of the potential of u-learning, this book is not the place for that. The editors are single-minded. They aim to inspire others to help us move towards the emerging environment and to go beyond the ideas reflected in these pages. They do this by offering a wide range of ideas, strategies and case studies to help the risk-taking educators on the way.

An index would help readers find their bearings or re-trace their steps. There is, however, a very useful glossary.

The target audience is all those engaged or interested in post-primary education and anyone

interested in designing u-learning environments. Sadly, the price will put off many individual educators, but university libraries at least would do well to find a place for this book on their shelves.

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Malita, Laura & Egetenmeyer, Regina ed (2011) *Students' ePortfolio for entering into the labour market* Peter Lang (New York & Bern) ISBN 978-3-631-61490-7 152 pp £23.40
<http://www.peterlang.com/index.cfm?event=cmp.ccc.seitenstruktur.detailseiten&seitentyp=produkt&pk=59484&concordeid=261490>

Summary

Malita and Egetenmeyer's practical and useful edited volume is for advocates of e-portfolios for use in the labour market. It is well structured and comprehensive and begins with a short history and essential definitional work. The articles are written in an easy conversational tone that will suit students and many readers from all parts of the education sector. If this book could be relevant to you, I recommend that you borrow a copy for a while.

Robyn Smyth

The authors of *Students' ePortfolio for entering into the labour market* provide clear guidance about e-portfolios' benefits and purposes that depends firmly on scholarship and extensive experience. They emphasise the positive opportunities which arise for self-reflection embedded in the portfolio processes and how these reflections are a critical element which distinguishes a portfolio from a cv. Contextualised in an action learning paradigm, e-portfolio processes are well explained with the use of diagrams and mind maps all of which could equally be exemplars of e-portfolio elements.

The exploration of the tools available to create an e-portfolio builds on seminal theorising from the early 2000s; it builds into a comprehensive matrix that will be particularly useful to any readers involved in evaluating products currently advertised strongly in the e-learning marketplace.

Linkages to social networking concepts and tools and to emerging trends in e-recruitment strategies contextualise an analysis of the e-portfolio as a

personal journey tool, which can tell a potential employee's employment, education and experiential story as well as establish an identity they can exploit for personal and employment purposes in the digital world.

The section on competences for job searching will be very helpful to students and teachers alike. It is based on seminal research analysing the factors that graduates believe have assisted them to make successful transitions into the labour market in Europe; the opportunities for such people to be able to display concrete capabilities (often called graduate attributes), domain knowledge and professional competence for potential employers are carefully described and compared to those found in other studies of employer expectations. One recommendation encourages awareness of "personal uniqueness" as a critical concept underpinning the ability to promote personal assets in the employability stakes. One question that remains unanswered relates to the contribution universities can make here, particularly where students are learning in broad disciplines such as adult education. The inclusion of reflections from a recent graduate is a bonus and will be insightful to many readers. Unfortunately, this chapter seems poorly located—it should have concluded the previous section, swapped with the chapter before it.

In a focussed analysis of skills and competencies for the early 21st century, there is an attempt to establish firmly the critical place of the e-portfolio in making visible the range of people who could usefully contribute to meeting particular entrepreneurial needs. We must wait to see whether the e-portfolio will play a core role contributing to the growth of social capital further in the future.

The closing notes under the heading "What an e-portfolio is not" are particularly useful for readers involved in processes of initiating newcomers; this is because they re-define the concept, and they dispel myths that have often hindered effective implementation.

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Ovens, Peter et al (2012) *Developing inquiry for learning* Routledge (New York & London) ISBN 978-0-415-59877-4 226 pp £24.99
<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415598774/>

Summary

The authors provide some useful ideas and a bridge from face-to-face into blended learning contexts that teachers interested in inquiry pedagogy may find useful. There are various scaffolds and exemplars as well as exploration of appropriate digital tools that can be of use for critical inquiry. If the content of this book is likely to be relevant to you, I advise you may find only parts of it of interest or use.

Robyn Smyth

The aim of *Developing inquiry for learning* is to support collaborative learning in higher education; in fact, it has a wider reach than that and could be of use as much with high school learners. The ideas will also be immediately applicable for use with vocational students at all levels, and with others who would gain from advancing the cause of critical inquiry skills. Early childhood teachers will find it particularly suitable to the youngsters they teach and the genre of their teaching.

Although inquiry learning is as much a pedagogical philosophy as a set of practical strategies, tutors with little pedagogical training will find this a useful volume for when they are working in face-to-face contexts. They could implement many of the exemplars with confidence in order to stimulate students to think and to conceptualise new ideas and old understandings. This pedagogical approach links well with the work of current theorists in higher education; however, there is mention of few of these. Formative and peer assessment techniques are explored in some detail as useful strategies for teachers wishing to move beyond conventional lecturing/tutoring paradigms. Much of the book dwells on the ways in which we *should* move forward, though perhaps with a bit too much missionary zeal. The final chapter is one example where there are many useful ideas and commentary on attitudinal change—however, these may suit some contexts but equally could be passé in others.

We much need discussion on how to translate all these important ideas into the wholly online realm—since this is where many vocational and higher education programmes are heading, as well as some in high school. Throughout, there is insufficient linkage to online learning and its pedagogy to inspire teachers to attempt implementation in computer-based and online teaching (unless they are experienced enough to take a pedagogical philosophy and apply it selectively within particular contexts in order to push the boundaries of theory and practice). The use of online tools is detailed, agreed—but only in order to enrich the face-to-face

process, rather than being embedded into a blended or fully inline approach. Given the well established use of synchronous and asynchronous online learning tools, it is becoming possible for distance learners to participate in action research practices of inquiry learning equally with their face-to-face peers, so further consideration of work in this area would be helpful. That said, many sound strategies are chronicled here in ways that experienced teachers will pick up, being assured that the learning design is appropriate and solidly based in long tested theory. After all, as the authors indicate in their conclusion to Chapter 8, new opportunities are presenting themselves in the form of ever changing technologies.

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Thouésny, Sylvie & Bradley, Linda ed (2011)
Second language teaching and learning with technology
 (Research-publishing.net, Dublin) ISBN 978-1-908416-00-1 217 pp Free of charge
<http://research-publishing.net/publication/978-1-908416-00-1.pdf>

Summary

This ten chapter volume intends to approach a number of current issues “from well-established web-based learning environments to mobile learning, through current web 2.0 applications such as blogs, which foster intercultural contexts and/or diverse means of computer-mediated interaction”. In this sense, the valuable book aims to enable readers to gain a deep understanding of the field and to provide research procedures and processes to facilitate the learning of foreign languages through the use of information technology. If you expect the content of this book to be relevant to you, I recommend that you buy a copy for your own use.

Jesús García Laborda

Writings of novel academics are usually one of the most fruitful and refreshing readings in any field. Experimented researchers tend to work on fields that have already been addressed either by themselves or by others. That is why I was immediately attracted to the intriguing title of this publication; the sub-title is also intriguing: “Views of emergent researchers”. The purpose of this edited ten chapter volume on computer aided language learning (CALL) is to

approach a number of current issues “from well-established web-based learning environments to mobile learning, [to] current web 2.0 applications such as blogs, which foster intercultural contexts and/or diverse means of computer-mediated interaction” (p X).

The book follows a traditional approach that can be defined as learning from and learning with information technology (IT); this relates to the learner’s role—the “from” implies passivity while “with” expresses a learner’s more active role and is connected with a socio-constructivist approach to language learning.

Additionally, the introduction tells us that IT should be considered a teaching tool rather than a goal in itself. This approach may well be seen in the practical nature of the chapters. For instance, Chapter 2 (“Personal learning environments in higher education language courses: An informal and learner-centred approach”) deals with such environments based on Web 2.0 applications for language courses in higher education through the innovative F-SHAPE project. Then Chapter 3 (“QuickAssist: Reading and learning vocabulary independently with the help of CALL and NLP technologies”) shows how to promote independent learning with available foreign language learning software.

The fourth chapter (“Self-assessment and tutor assessment in online language learning materials: InGenio FCE online course and tester”) is probably the one I enjoyed most. For many years assessment has been left aside in computer assisted language learning due to the intrinsic difficulty of the processes involved and because much assessment has addressed traditional methods of objective evaluation. This chapter opens new perspectives towards the use of more communicative tasks in online assessment; it also provides valuable information that can be used by those who plan similar projects.

Chapter 5 (“Mobile-assisted language learning: Designing for your students”) relates to a topic of increasing importance that may well be relevant in future years—once educational software and apps have become more frequent and robust than they seem to be today (especially after the idiosyncratic difficulties of putting text into mobile devices can be overcome). Chapters 6 and 8 (“A design for intercultural exchange—An analysis of engineering students’ interaction with English majors in a poetry blog” and “Second language learning by exchanging cultural contexts through the mobile group blog”) deal with the use of blogs through two different delivery means—but both stress the importance of socio-cultural aspects in language learning and the role of IT through information and internal

linguistic processes in its transmission. This is also emphasised in the context of synchronous communication in Chapter 7 (“Developing sociolinguistic competence through intercultural online exchange”).

Finally, the socio-constructivist approach appears again in Chapter 9 (“Dynamically assessing written language: To what extent do learners of French language accept mediation?”); this considers implications of IT-based dynamic assessment applications. Since computer based dynamic assessment is also being studied in a number of recent publications, there is no question that this chapter is a valuable asset to this excellent book.

The contents of this book on computer assisted language teaching form a robust body of well funded and well designed research. The book reads extremely well and is accessible to a wide range of readers. Some of the topics in the chapters have been addressed for a long time—considering that this research area is rather new—but most are quite trendy. This particular coverage not only brings recent research into perspective but is critical and challenging of some traditional perspectives of CALL.

The case studies discussed in the book provide an opportunity to overview the field of CALL while contributing accounts of new topics of research and

application. Readers will surely benefit from the well funded research across a number of topics which also serves practical applications. In my opinion, the book has two other valuable aspects: first, since the authors are quite young (mostly in their twenties) we can consider these chapters as early presentations of prospective strong papers; and, second, the book is freely accessible so their ideas will definitely spread, to be used and enjoyed by many, especially where this kind of book is hard to find.

In short, here is a book that many teachers and researchers will want to read. It also serves as food for thought in connection with current aspects of general educational technology and it shows emergent research which will soon become the future of CALL.

Editor's note To quote from the publisher's home page, “Research-publishing.net is established as a not-for-profit association under French law since September 2010, and is committed to making edited collections of research papers a freely available public resource.” This book appears to be their first and only publication as yet (October 2012).

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