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Skinner, Elisabeth (2008) Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: designing and delivering e-learning. Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (2). pp. 89-91.

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/3737>

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Book Reviews

Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: designing and delivering e-learning

Helen Beetham & Rhona Sharpe (eds)

Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, 260pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-415-40874-5 (pbk)

Teaching and learning experiences in higher education are being transformed by digital technologies. This has required a rethink to identify the pedagogy that underpins the transformation. This edited book, containing contributions from 30 leading practitioners in the fields of e-learning and learning design, is useful for someone seeking to appreciate the current state of scholarship, practice and debate in this field. It is also valuable for teachers taking time out to reflect on ideas that will improve their own designs for e-learning.

The aim of the book is to think in new ways about designing activities for learning using digital technologies. It integrates reflections on practice, research and pedagogy (defined as the act of guiding people to learn). The book is organised into three parts, with 16 chapters and 11 appendices coherently arranged by the editors. Part One connects research and theories of learning to the design of activities using digital technologies. Part Two focuses on specific contexts in practice, including different disciplines and traditions, and ends with ideas for the future. Part Three is a collection of resources for practical use.

In her foreword, Diana Laurillard notes that the book contributes to the current period of transition between a pre-digital age and digitally-aware context for learning. She challenges practitioners to design e-learning activities that motivate and help individual students meet their own personal needs for learning. The editors, Helen Beetham and Rhona Sharpe, seek innovative models of learning design with new perspectives on pedagogy and creative uses of digital technology rather than the incremental adapting of traditional methods. They argue that digital technologies are challenging existing values and provide a new context for teaching and learning driven by the marketplace where students expect instantaneous information and data sharing from the Internet, information skills relevant to the workplace and digitally organised institutions.

Many contributions make it clear, however, that the transition continues to be a struggle and truly new ideas are not easy to pin down. For example, the authors in Part One explore a variety of models of learning design in the search for 'effective pedagogical practice' (Oliver *et al.*), but practice refuses to be easily controlled and it is acknowledged that students' responses to activities are personal and highly dependent on individual situations. Conole recognises that technology is not yet realising its full potential and suggests that the shift from information to communication, passive to active and individual to social learning is difficult to articulate. McAndrew & Goodyear grapple with guidance to practitioners on learning design. There is tension, as always, in catering for the human/computer relationship and making learning designs reusable.

The editors want to put teachers back in the driving seat so they can design activities that exploit new digital tools rather than feeling pushed by the technology. The book aims to uncover ideas that can be used by teachers in everyday practice rather than by the innovative few. To some extent, the practical elements tend to be overwhelmed by the theory, scholarship and models of learning design, but there are useful suggestions for teachers, especially in Parts Two and Three. Beetham's own contribution provides a comprehensive model (and a useful checklist in Appendix 4) to stimulate thinking about the design of a learning activity. Masterman & Vogel reassure teachers by emphasising the process of experiment and iterative design by which they learn how to apply the technology. Specific chapters in Part Two will strike a chord with practitioners depending on their discipline. As a teacher of local government, I engaged immediately with the chapters on designing activities for professional and vocational subjects and the social sciences while others will find resonances in the sections written from the arts and systems design perspectives. Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler tantalise with glimpses of the potential of mobile technologies, ideal for capturing learning in the field and making learning more personal.

Part Three contains useful resources for practitioners linked to the debate in earlier chapters and includes a summary of key theoretical ideas, a typology of design tools, a taxonomy of activities and checklists for designing and evaluating activities for learning.

The book provides several examples of projects set up to develop and share innovative practice. There is a real sense that the book represents a practitioner community, each aware of others' contributions to the debate and working at the cutting edge of

design in a higher education sector that is rapidly evolving. Beetham & Sharpe have organised a significant resource for the reflective practitioner or pedagogical researcher working on designs for learning in a new digital world.

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