Reviews

Atkins, Liz (2009) Invisible students, impossible dreams Trentham (Stoke-on-Trent & Sterling VA) ISBN 978-1-85856-379-4 170 pp £18.99 http://www.trentham-books.co.uk/cgi-bin/sh000001.pl?REFPAGE=http%3a%2f%2fwww.trentham-books.co.uk%2fcgi-bin%2fs000001.p%3f%3page%3dsearch%26SS%3datkins%26search.x%3d0%26search.y%3d0%26search%3dACTION%26PR%3d1%26TB%3dA&WD=dreams%20impossible%20students%20invisible%20students%20%3ap%9781858564517#

Liz Atkins’s Invisible students, impossible dreams – with the sub-title “Experiencing vocational education 14-19”—is a study that needed to happen. Very little research into lower level vocational provision in Britain has previously been published. The lack of research is surprising, given that foundation level 1 was introduced in 1993 and yet significant numbers of vocational students will still, after completing their foundation level 1, decide not to take up foundation level 2. Why don’t they? They have aspirations for the future and prefer their new college environment to school, yet they leave college, and with insufficient subject knowledge. What are the reasons and what the implications?

This study examines the experiences of young lower level learners on vocational programmes. With new authentic data on offer, the old assumptions can be contested. Ongoing debates in professional and academic circles on issues of reform for policy and practice will benefit from this research. It is robust, richly referenced, critical, sensitive and comprehensive.

The author is Principal Lecturer in Learning and Skills at Trent University, and has extensive previous teaching experience with students aged 14-19 in further education. In the book’s introduction, she declares the values that inspired this research:

- a deep-rooted belief in the intrinsic value of each individual, and
- a commitment to the concept of social justice.

From this perspective and with three groups of students, on vocational programmes at different colleges, this piece of inspiring research emerges. The participants’ experiences are reported in Part 2, and relate to four underlying questions in the study:

- What does it mean to engage in vocational learning as a lower level student?
- How do lower level students construct their learning identities?
- What factors influence or constrain the development of those identities?
- What aspirations for the future do the students hold?

Working with these young learners led to a bank of new information with implications for all the stakeholders in 14-19 education and training. There are thirteen chapters with introductions and summaries, and each chapter discusses between three and six discrete themes in good detail.

Invisible students, impossible dreams can be explored at many levels from many aspects. It is a rich source for trainee teachers, teaching practitioners, managers and professionals in the 14-19 sector and not to be missed!

Inge Martin (received November 2009)

Librarian: Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), Burnhams Branch, UK
ingmar.cca@btinternet.com

http://mcgraw-hill.co.uk/html/0335233759.html

To whatever extent your current work involves aspiring to change the practices of others, this book will help. Its theme chimes nicely with the current shift from e-learning to tel (technology enhanced learning), and a number of chapters are directly relevant to BJET readers. In saying that, I would not want to diminish the whole book’s importance to us. After all, who has not attempted to improve learning or associated processes (to be beaten back in the attempt)!

With reference to Murray Saunders’s wonderfully flexible model, “From distribution to interaction” (p 96), as an example of (merely) “dissemination practice”, the book could not expect to command the levels of engagement required to shift higher education to embrace a more aspirational notion of quality assurance. This is so although an early brushing aside of “modernist measure-and-mend” (p 14) change theory could draw dissenters to the debate through sheer controversy. “Enhancement” has yet to win the hearts and minds of all those charged with defining and defending quality in higher education.
Yet the book is so lovingly designed, it is hard to resist engaging with its argument. Layered between concise introductory and concluding chapters are four themes:

- influencing the disciplines;
- the Scottish way: a distinctive approach to enhancement;
- developing frameworks for action;
- challenging practices in learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum.

Each theme contains four case studies, one from each of the four levels within higher education (these being the national, institutional, departmental and individual levels). Each theme has brief introductory and concluding chapters by one of the book’s co-authors. The case studies are like an arsenal of vignettes with which to challenge inertia at every level in the system, not for us to “learn direct, general, lessons from”, but to “illuminate” the authors’ “explicit concepts and theory” (p 5) and to draw readers into reflexive “translation, reconstruction and bridging” (p 5).

With a theoretical lens predicated upon “social practice”, the authors and contributors offer an immersive experience of change in action; and, by the end of the book, their target for the biggest change is clear—it is none other than you, the reader. That kind of change is off-putting if, as I, you are tempted to float hopefully through innovative projects with little more than a “common sense approach to leading change” (p 184), then to be left wondering why we under-achieved. The authors are to be applauded for this—why should your own “comfort zone” be left intact when your actions are likely to breach the comfort zones of others?

If we, as individuals, care about our role within higher education, this is the kind of book we should be reading—and leaving on campus coffee tables wherever we can.

Mike Johnson (received December 2009)
Lecturer, Cardiff School of Nursing and Midwifery
johnsonmr@cardiff.ac.uk

http://www.routledgedirect.com/books/Mobile-Learning-Communities/isbn9780415991599

This scholarly work, underpinned by an evidence base, explores the nature of mobility and why the static geography of the classroom is no longer appropriate for certain populations. It investigates evidence about why traditional contexts have probably never been appropriate for those groups who must travel to work or to survive. In the book’s Introduction, the writers suggest how some people can learn and grow from the unexpected while others—such as homeless youth—have their identities circumscribed by the constraints of mobility options.

Into this world of challenges and diversity, the authors suggest that, if we are being comprehensive about our pedagogies of mobility, we need to explore the range of educational provision for the interests of different groups. Paramount in this exploration are the differences between traditional spatially-based educational provision with its emphasis on competition between individuals versus the need to find supportive communities that reduce constraints and increase the opportunities for mobile learners.

The concepts associated with mobility and learning communities are also raised in the Introduction; the book then explores several ideas in eight chapters followed by a conclusion which suggests new educational futures to deal with the range of issues raised. The eight chapters are well described by their titles: networks and partnerships, lifelong learning, technologies and their uses, globalisation and interactions with the outside world, the knowledge economy and workplace learning, multi-literacies and meaning-making, communities at risk (and in particular, building capacities for sustainability), and (finally) marginalisation and transformation.

Of particular interest to BJET readers, the chapter on technologies explores the obvious ways in which they can support some of the ideals of interactive learning—such as the concept of presence to support motivation and social connectedness. Technologies are conceived very broadly, including not only their support of learning (such as IT) but also how they underpin the ability to earn income. Several examples of groups such as circus performers or refugees provide stark comparisons in how technologies support earning and learning.

The chapter on multi-literacies also introduces several concepts of relevance to learning technology: most importantly it puts learning in its place by stressing the current conceptual bases for applying technologies—namely, the use of an authentic context and the need for each learner to construct his/her own understandings with the help of the community around. In fact, the end of this chapter—like all the others—includes questions for reflection, and the authors suggest “In what ways can new and emerging information technologies contribute to fostering the multi-literacies of mobile...
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content engaging, and because of how a well structured game experience disseminates the control away from the designer into the hands of the learner. After a chapter about capturing student design projects to ensure reflection, the next to last provides advice to the student with several heuristics about approaching the learning technology design space, while the last gives detailed descriptions of some relevant student projects.

The only missing element in this work is the lack of examples of other exciting developments that have increasingly been on display in other parts of the world—but, as a summary of the challenges that have been grabbed and addressed by scholars in the USA, the work provides a great resource.

http://www.routledge.com/books/Educating-Learning-Technology-Designers-isbn9780805864724

Every now and again, you wonder why no one has tried to synthesise a field of endeavour—but this volume is testament to modern thinking about what it takes to be a learning designer. A compilation of well-illustrated chapters, it comes from a Google software engineer with an academic appointment “on the side”, a Stanford education professor, and a freelance science writer. This editorial combination is symptomatic of the range and diversity of the contributions—all the way from education scholars to technology specialists. The contributors of the fifteen chapters have an equally diverse set of institutions, though they and the book are very much US-based.

This considered collection looks in the learning sciences at the area of current interest called learning design outside North America. In the same way as designers seek to create learning experiences that are not simply repetitious of school learning—but rather focus upon engaging creative construction of meaning—these chapters provide illustrations and address modern thinking that have broken away from traditional instructional design. The differences emphasise the importance of technology as it supports learners’ representations, the social construction of knowledge, instant inherent feedback, and scaffolding the learning activity.

The first chapter explores the nature of design knowledge and how we can teach it; and the second extends these ideas into aspects of collaborative design. The next two chapters explore projects through different client audiences—saying what can be achieved working with, respectively, K-12 educators and university teachers as design clients. The next four chapters discuss strategies used with different design courses – they move from feedback to scaffolding, remind us of the importance of interdisciplinarity, outline the use of the studio model, and provide an analytical deconstruction of a technology design course. Three chapters discuss the role of the game strategy—as a way of learning about design, as a way of making small chunks of

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Consider teachers’ professional development an integral part of technology and curriculum integration—their success as educators depends on their ability to communicate effectively in various technologically-mediated environments. It is also necessary to investigate what it actually means to be media-literate in the current social and technological context, as media literacy appears to be key to integrating technology in schools in meaningful and socially responsible ways.

This book is very well structured and easy to read. Its reflective and thought-provoking approach makes it easy reading not only for teachers but for anybody interested in educational issues. Even though it makes explicit reference to the USA school system, all reflections are of general nature and wide application, which makes it interesting and stimulating for prospective readers from any country.

Giuliana Dettori (received January 2010)
Researcher at the Institute for Educational Technology of CNR, Genoa, Italy
dettori@itd.cnr.it

Dymoke, Sue & Harrison, Jennifer ed (2008)
http://www.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book231757

This book tries to provide beginning secondary teachers with knowledge and skills in all professional areas; it has a main theme of reflective practice. Therefore, the first chapter in the book, written by Jennifer Harrison, starts with discussing reflective practice and its role in professional development. It presents reflective practice as a pedagogical approach in which teachers can begin to learn through professional enquiry. It provides beginning secondary teachers with opportunities to engage in reflection—in order to deepen their understanding of what reflective practice means and to build skills necessary for reflection so that they can practise reflection in and on teaching as means for growing professionally. The book widens the scope of reflection by not restricting it to the evaluation of teaching and learning strategies (technical level). Harrison asserts that we should use reflective practice, to critically explore people’s assumptions in their teaching. This also involves reflecting on the ethical and political dimensions of educational goals.

In Chapter 2, Sue Dymoke introduces learning theories. She briefly introduces behaviourism by focusing on Skinner’s work and the implications of behaviourism for education. Then she introduces constructivist theories through summarising the thoughts of key figures such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner. Consistent with the theme of the book, some activities encourage readers to think about the implications of these theories for teaching and learning.

In Chapter 3, Dymoke introduces a huge amount of information in a very condensed manner. Topics include contexts of learning (types of school, ability grouping, “Every child matters”—the British equivalent of the US’s “No child left behind”—and inclusion), differentiation, and key skills and functional skills. All these topics are very important—but here deserve more detail to be understandable to teachers, in particular beginning teachers.

Chapter 4 introduces us to classroom management. Phil Wood tries to bring together all that has to do with classroom management in one chapter. He explains the relevant importance and format of lesson plans; lesson evaluations; managing the learning environment; behaviour management; communication and questioning; and even assessment for learning (AfL). Finally, we meet different uses of information technology. With the chapter being so busy with all these topics, there is no space for in-depth discussion or for opportunities for reflection (the main theme of the book).

Assessment is the subject of Chapter 5. Here, Tony Lawson briefly discusses many issues related to classroom assessment. He reminds readers of the definitions of basic terms used in assessment. Then he moves to summative, formative, normative, criterion-referenced, and baseline forms of assessment. He also discusses briefly many other issues related to assessment. Assessment for learning (AfL) is a vital tool for teachers. The book advocates the use of this type of assessment with the full involvement of learners. Teachers need to build their learners’ ability to reflect on their learning and plan for improving it. This requires them to determine where they are going (learning targets), where they stand now (AfL), and how they can bridge the gap between the two points.

Chapter 6 gives a brief description of the history of education in Britain and invites the readers to reflect on issues concerning teachers and educators in general (such as equality and inclusion). We now have the opportunity to examine and reflect on our professional values and perspectives. In general, Hilary Cremin looks at some critical aspects of teaching and schooling. All these are important for raising teachers’ awareness of the educational system in which they work.

Angela Wortley and Jennifer Harrison close the book with pastoral care and tutorial roles. They direct teachers’ attention to their many roles other
than classroom teaching and expand these roles to include the contribution to the well-being and development of students.

Othman N Alsawaie (received December 2009)  
Associate professor, College of Education, United Arab Emirates University  
alsawaie@uaeu.ac.ae


Robert Ellis and Peter Goodyear, at the University of Sydney, take an ecological view of universities and other institutions. Their sub-title—“The ecology of sustainable innovations”—might make you think they were writing about green matters, like reducing the carbon footprint of a university. But they’re not. Ecology, they say, is the science of interactions between individual organisms and their environments. Their focus is firmly on students and the students’ experiences of e-learning.

In her foreword, Diana Laurillard says “Digital technology will not go away … . Its use in teaching and learning has to be woven into the fabric of the institution, manifested in every aspect of its activities … as we all try to face up to the onslaught of continual invention from the world of [this] technology.”

Read this book if you’re interested in changing policy and practice in your university. Read it if you want to develop your view of what learning at this level can be in this century. Read it if you would like an update on research, particularly by these two authors, into students’ use of e-learning. Be ready, however, to re-read the conceptually dense portions.

Personally, I was fascinated by the chapter on campus planning, particularly the part on physical and virtual learning spaces. Although Ellis and Goodyear’s data on the University of Sydney are now a few years out of date, the debates they describe continue on many campuses. Plenty of courses in 2010 have little e-learning provision (though doubtless even there the students willy-nilly resort to electronic sources because they are the best). Plenty of campus buildings lack proper wiring and/or wi-fi. E-learning is unevenly integrated into the curriculum. Even at the University of Oxford, with its vast libraries and very generous e-learning facilities, many courses rely far more on human contact than electronic, on books rather than screens. And most of the UK Open University’s 250 000 distance students continue to depend on text as their main learning medium, despite global provision for e-learning.

At a time when universities face the consequences of the recent economic crises, and when climate change demands adaptation on a large scale soon, does e-learning have something special to offer to students? Read this book to find out. The authors are sane: they don’t exaggerate. They look forward as well as telling the story so far. University teachers and administrators have reason to bless them for their lucid analysis and clear vision.

David Hawkridge (received December 2009)  
Emeritus Professor, Institute of Educational Technology, The Open University, UK  
d.g.hawkridge@open.ac.uk

http://www.routledgeeducation.com/books/Second-Language-Teacher-Education-isbn9780415800792

This slim but dense monograph, addressed to scholars of second language (L2) teacher education, presents a sound methodological discussion on how to reflect on this field.

The attention to reflection in teacher preparation has been rapidly growing in the past years, with many books and papers addressed to teacher trainers suggesting methods to stimulate and guide teachers’ reflection. Johnson’s book goes one step further, stimulating the reflection of teacher educators themselves. It adopts a sociocultural perspective as theoretical framework to analyse the epistemological foundations shaping the actions of L2 teacher trainers. Its main goal is to express how a sociocultural perspective changes our understanding of language, language teaching, teacher learning, and in general the way to conceive L2 teacher professional development.

A socio-cultural perspective sees learning as a dynamic, social activity, situated in physical and social contexts. In this view, engagement in social activities shape human cognition. Learning does not consist of the direct acquisition of knowledge or skills, but of the progressive shift from external, socially mediated activity to the internal control of cognition and action by individual learners, with consequent transformation of both the activity and
the learners’ mind. A central point of a sociocultural perspective is therefore to explain the relationship between mental functioning and the cultural, institutional and historical situations in which it takes place. If we look at L2 learning from this perspective, language appears to regulate learners’ activity and at the same time take significance from it. Hence, meaning does not reside in language itself but in the social use of it made by learners.

This book looks at a number of relevant aspects of L2 teacher training, according to such perspectives as teachers seen as learners of teaching, language as social practice, and teaching as dialogic media tion. The influence of several macrostructures on L2 teaching and learning is also considered, in particular of the analytical frameworks used, of the reform policies, and of the approaches to professional development applied. Some future challenges for L2 teacher education are finally identified:

• recognising the context’s impact on what kinds of learning environment teachers are willing and able to create for their L2 students, as well as on how teachers devise and enact their teaching practices;
• exploring the complex relationship between teacher professional learning and student achievements, which is crucial to call the attention of policy makers on this important point; and
• equipping teachers with intellectual tools of inquiry to enable them to create educationally sound, contextually appropriate, and socially fair learning opportunities for their students, resisting fashionable and unsound policy prescriptions.

I found this book pleasant, stimulating and enlightening reading, as well as a good source of information. I suggest it to whoever is interested not only in L2 teacher training but also in teacher training in general, because it is a valid example of how reflection on learning and on the teaching profession can fruitfully be developed in a sociocultural perspective.

Giuliana Dettori (received January 2010)
Researcher at the Institute for Educational Technology of CNR, Genoa, Italy
dettori@itd.cnr.it

http://shop.acer.edu.au/acer-shop/product/A4084BK/35;jsessionid=166550F3BB02E34BE2DB145934BE8601

This book presents technology as a means for successful education for all students. The introduction of the book is very informative and it lays down the grounds for the subjects that will be covered in the chapters. In the introduction, the authors try to explain the importance of digital technology in teaching and the reasons that hinder its use. I liked most the part where they talked about the fact that students use many digital technologies outside the school but very little or none in school. This is a conflict to be resolved. Many schools do not use technology to aid learning—and sometimes if a school’s management is interested, it might provide the infrastructure ... but still find technology not used as it should be.

There is also an attempt to define the term educational technology, based on the definitions of different people, and there’s a list of the different types of technology used through the years. This leads to some of the reasons why technology has not been widely used in education and training.

The book is in three parts. The first, three chapters, introduces aspects of the content. In the first main part—seven chapters—the authors try to list and define the uses of the discrete instructional technologies. They start by discussing the importance of teaching boards and how they have been used in the classroom through the years. Then they move to talk about films, radio, visual tools, television, video and audio, and computers. Teachers have tried to use these different media to add value to the teaching and learning. In this part of the book, you can learn about the history of such learning resources (instructional tools). This part is very interesting: most similar books discuss the uses of the tools but not the history of educational technology.

The second part of the book—nine chapters and called “Integrated instructional technologies”—tries to show how the integration of technology has developed. It presents the different technologies such as films, radios, videos and computer and how they have been used. Then it moves to address school libraries and the challenges that have faced their existence and how important they are in providing different instructional tools to students. By the 2000s, library staff are expected to provide the requisite leadership and to support information management for schools. The authors then look briefly at the major networking teaching opportunities: they comment on the different uses of the World Wide Web, e-mail, search engines, and the web confer ence. There’s a brief discussion of the different digital toolkits and the authors discuss the digital camera, calculators, data projectors, scanners, digital television, and mobile digital technologies. The authors discuss in depth the use of interactive whiteboards in schools by teachers and their benefits. After that, they come back to the historical
significance of instructional tools and offer some case studies of teachers’ use. Then they discuss the duration of the life cycle of instructional technology and finally present some lessons that we can learn about the use of instructional tools in teaching.

The book is well written and easy to understand. It comes in short chapters with clear titles about what the reader is to expect. The book is of particular value for teachers of educational technology and for anyone interested in the use of instructional technologies.

Iman M Alghazo (received December 2009)
Associate professor, College of Education, United Arab Emirates University
alghazo@uaeu.ac.ae


This book and the accompanying dvds constitute a Commonwealth guide to implementing Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (adopted in 2007). Its author—a former teacher who is himself disabled—led the charity Disability Equality in Education until it closed in 2009 having met all its funded targets.

There are 5-600 million people with disabilities across the globe, 80-90 per cent of whom are in developing countries and 120-150 million of whom are children. Only 1-5 per cent of disabled children in less developed countries are able to attend school. Many are stigmatised, made to feel cursed, worthless and that they don’t belong, and are hidden from sight. We need a massive programme of change to ensure that these children can participate fully in all aspects of school life.

Many states are currently failing to meet the internationally binding requirements of this UN Convention. However, this book shows that it is possible to achieve inclusive education in countries both rich and poor. It does this with case studies of good practice in policy making for inclusion at national, provincial, regional and district levels and in the provision of inclusive education in classrooms. The states concerned range from the UK, Canada and New Zealand to Africa, India and Papua New Guinea. The text usefully documents these cases and the dvd modules provide well over four hours of illuminating, inspiring first-hand accounts of introducing children with disabilities into regular classrooms; this will be invaluable in familiarisation and training programmes. Some of the classrooms shown are well resourced; others depend upon local communities rallying to build resources from whatever materials come to hand. In some cases, parents and communities need to be persuaded of the need for, and feasibility of, inclusive education through household visits, street plays and rallies. Sometimes disabled children are helped in their learning by their non-disabled peers and sometimes the teachers are themselves disabled.

The book makes a significant contribution to the literature of inclusive education. However, surprisingly, having raised the issue of the many disabled adults who also are uneducated or under-educated, none of its case studies deal with adult schooling. There is also no mention of how open and educational technology-based education can assist in helping disabled learners of all ages. For example, in India, the National Institute for Open Schooling encourages greater participation by persons with disabilities by waiving all fees. There, more and more disabled students enrol in open schools in line with government policy for making schooling inclusive, and students with orthopedic and mental disabilities reportedly perform as well as their non-disabled counterparts (DNIS News Network, 2005, 3(24)). We must hope that this book will challenge readers of BJET to provide further findings and recommendations on how alternative forms of delivery can help inclusive education worldwide.

Colin Latchem (received November 2009)
Open learning consultant, Australia
catchem@iinet.net.au

http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book233073#tabview=title

This edited text by te Riele begins with an interesting but familiar premise: we are forced to attend school for many years and, during this time, many of us get to the point that we just want to leave and get on with our lives. This sets the context for the remaining chapters of the book—which focus on issues regarding non-participation in, and disengagement from, compulsory education. Non-participation is becoming increasingly widespread, with up to 40% of 14- to 25-year-olds disengaged from education and lifelong learning.
Other themes running throughout the book are that: education is a form of survival, identity is crucial to engagement with education, and hope should be fostered and maintained in educational settings. Integrated throughout most of the chapters is a range of current policy agendas, such as the drive to raise standards and narrow the educational gap in the UK. Further, the text extends beyond the scope of what’s happening in the UK educational system by drawing on examples from a range of countries such as: the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, and America. These examples, and associated case studies, ensure that the text will appeal to an international audience.

The importance of technology to support learning and engagement with school is also embedded in, and highlighted through, a number of case studies. For example, a chapter focuses on how Australian students use e-learning and IT to gain remote access to education. Similarly, chapters also suggest that schooling should be offered in a flexible way to ensure engagement.

Throughout the text the authors integrate, refer to, and include a number of case studies. These are helpful for readers as they draw parallels between practice and the points raised in the more theoretical orientated chapters. One of the striking features of the text is that the case studies and other examples clearly illustrate how the concepts discussed throughout the book can be applied in a realistic setting. Therefore, this will ensure that the text appeals to a range of audiences including both educational practitioners and those studying a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses focusing on education and children’s experiences at school.

The text is a compilation of chapters written in a clear and engaging style that further enhances its readability. Helpfully, each chapter has a series of useful learning features (such as bullet points) that set the scene for the remainder of the chapter, and references to further reading and useful websites.

Lucy R Betts (received December 2009)
Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, UK
Lucy.betts@ntu.ac.uk

http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book2322766

This book will provide valuable support and inspiration for tutors who, in their work with online learning, have already met some of the current possibilities, challenges and theories on which the text expands. They will welcome the way these are considered in considerable depth. The coverage is divided, for me, into objective consideration of the changes which confront us: the present position, and needs with regard to related research; and the importance of what is now described as “social presence”. I shall review each of these in turn, taking the current challenges first.

The internet has given every learner the possibility of access to resources hitherto inaccessible unless selected and paraphrased for them by their teachers. Consequently there has been a noteworthy, and economically welcomed, increase in learning by doing, and a decrease in learning about content material – from inputs purpose-made by teachers. This has in turn promoted social networking, through the harnessing of collective intelligence, with the associated and acute need for both students and tutors to develop 21st century skills. That means engaging with a range of Web 2.0 tools, whose advantages and disadvantages are carefully considered in one chapter in this book. The change has also brought persisting and increasing ethical dilemmas, which are given due and thorough attention by another writer.

The editors have thoughtfully planned and assembled their chapters to stimulate, as well as to inform, the adoption of the online environment (within blended learning) as a teaching vehicle of the future. It is this radical change which demands a re-examination of our core beliefs about pedagogy, and about how students learn and develop. For it is only with this in mind that we can effectively progress to the transformation in education which has been called Learning 2.0.

As one editor insists elsewhere, online teaching developed not from innovative changes in pedagogy, but from advances in communication technology. In the case of these developments, the perceived complexity of intelligent learning systems receives thorough attention, in a chapter where it is shown how intelligent tutoring systems can bring about significant improvement in learning outcomes.

A practical emphasis is also provided by one pair of writers who expand upon the characteristics which today’s students bring to their learning – multitasking, learning audio-visually and interactively. At the same time, they identify and confront the negative characteristics which tutors encounter—notably shorter attention spans, lack of reflection, poor text literacy and “a cavalier attitude to the quality of sources”.

On research, the coverage in the text is terse, because in this new field authoritative research...
findings are thin on the ground. The writers grapple – successfully, I felt – with the challenge pointed out by one of them, namely the fact that the research literature comes from many different communities of practice, using very different terminologies. It is perhaps understandable at this stage in the development of the field that many such research studies are descriptive and anecdotal, and often atheoretical. Such full research studies as there are, it is maintained, currently continue to rely upon a techno-centric view of innovation; and studies addressing teaching and learning may be held to lack quantitative support, lacking strong evidence and coming from small samples in particular settings. Consequently e-learning can be held to lack a solid empirical or theoretical foundation to date. For that reason the detailed attention given by one writer to proposing three different models of action research, which can be regarded as the bridge into full educational research, is welcome and constructive.

Social presence features strongly throughout. A welcome and practical theme in the text is the stress which students (and the editors) place upon the role of the tutor (I prefer that word to the North American “instructor”) as a critical element of the learning experience. Communication with tutors, if neglected, will have deleterious effects for learning. The possibility that humans may be neurologically hard-wired for face-to-face interaction, with bodily and emotional communication as the infrastructure of verbal communication, is aired in useful detail.

Careful consideration is given to the need to develop a pedagogy and practice of online peer-to-peer, small-group, problem-based interactions. The important potential of such arrangements for intimate and collaborative learning, with an appropriate level of group trust, is brought out well. One writer points out that “communities can’t be manufactured, but you can design the conditions under which they are most likely to emerge; and encourage their growth when they do.” Amen to that, many interested readers will surely respond. Several writers here focus on the importance of tutors having an extra sense of presence in the online classroom (where a learner-focused introvert tutor can shine without depending upon the charisma and content expertise which are of high value in face-to-face settings). They offer suggestions about how that presence can be nurtured, to generate valued learning outcomes – by creating and developing virtual spaces which are conducive to learning. Finally, almost, those readers with some experience in the field will surely resonate with the writer who expands upon what he calls “candle-power”. He has coined this surprising title to sum up what was for him a revelation, in the way “the limited field of a computer screen seems to actually strengthen the focus of concentration and the power of imagination, just as conversation can deepen over candle-light.”

I can express my review in one sentence. This handbook deals with the context of online learning with which I and many other readers will have had to become rapidly aware; it pinpoints the challenges we have met, and others which perhaps we should have met; and it offers helpful thinking, theory and examples in response.

John Cowan (received December 2009)
Visiting Professor, Birmingham City University
J.Cowan@hw.ac.uk

http://www.eurospanbookstore.com/display.asp?K=9781605666679&ds=Education&sf1=bin2_subj_code&st1=JN&sort=sort_date&d&m=117&dc=5000

This is not a book as much as a veritable library. In its 450 or so A4 pages of clear, well-written and consistently edited text, it contains more than any reader could expect under this title.

In accordance with current educational thinking, its treatment of planning for the assessment of learning is inexorably intermingled with consideration of planning suitable learning experiences, and in many cases, of evaluating the effectiveness of that planning. Thus, you will find many evaluated suggestions for learning and teaching, as well as for the consequent assessment of learning and learners. There are few chapters which do not combine these elements of curricula quite naturally – and hence creatively and constructively.

The chapters incorporate case studies to illustrate the methods and the points made by the writers. They are presented in a warm, readable, collegial style. The rigour, the detail and the theory are there, but are communicated informally as between colleagues, rather than formally in an effort to impress a scholarly readership. This makes the content accessible, attractive, and readily assimilated and applied. The book is certainly heavy in a physical sense, because of its size; but neither its style nor its content is heavy.

Like many collections written and published in the United States, the vocabulary, usage and concepts
are North American. Readers from the east of the Atlantic will need to adjust to rather different usage of the terms “assessment” and “evaluation”. Since this North American usage has been followed consistently throughout the volume, the problem is not too great.

From amongst 24 excellent chapters, all dealing with diverse subject areas and methods of assessment, it is invidious to pick out a few in this review. However I do so, selecting from my own personal preferences and interests, to indicate the general richness and variety on offer to the reader.

For instance, I found much of value and use in the chapter by Lewittes. She gives an inspiring account of the use of graded rubric of critical thinking skills in assessing, and before that in learning and teaching this complex area. She describes how the components of the criteria in her rubric not only aided her in making judgements of her students’ work, but served as a basis for her development of appropriate and effective learning experiences. In contrast, Thompson and Vaccaro usefully engage in the debate about reconciling qualitative and quantitative methods, and in so doing seek to bridge the divide between positivism and constructivism or post-modernism. They offer firm advice, substantiated by the case studies they present, for those who would use mixed methods and expect to find them as valuable as the dominant quantitative paradigm. Aitken concentrates more on assessment and evaluation than on programme design. She uses as her example a case study comparing online, distance and traditional modes of presentation, analysing the findings to identify scope for enhancement. She stresses and exemplifies how determining the causes of learning differences is crucial in determining ways to improve “instruction”. Last, I warmed especially to Chambliss who passionately yet reasonably argues the neglected necessity in liberal arts assessment of the student as a whole. I shall return to it frequently, to find my first reading. I did not do justice to the writings in this volume on mobile technology in learning. Vavpula, Pachler and Kukulska-Hulme provide a background to the methods and tools used in researching this new area of learning with technology discussed in 21 chapters under five sections: introduction, frameworks, methods, research designs, and way forward.

Norbert Pachler, while defining the field in Chapter 1, proposes an interdisciplinary approach to mobile learning that can accommodate research method diversity. In Chapter 2, Mike Sharples identifies the problems of evaluation of mobile learning from three perspectives: usability, effectiveness and satisfaction. Livingstone in Chapter 3 continues his work on “informal learning” to identify its synergy with learning in mobile contexts.

In Part II, there are six chapters describing different frameworks (taken from different domains of knowledge) to consider while doing mobile learning research. The frameworks discussed include learning and teaching mathematical skills in the workplace (Chapter 4), case-study based qualitative learning (Chapter 5), activity theory (Chapter 6), learning by design (Chapter 7), situated ethnographic approach (Chapter 8), and mobile communities (Chapter 9). In Part III, six chapters discuss various methods used in different mobile learning projects. Some of the methods discussed are the use of mobile as a data collection tool, mobile eye tracking, personal meaning mapping and automatic log analysis (Chapter 15).

With several billions of cellphone users by now, mobile technology is the fastest growing technology in the world. Not surprisingly, educational technologists enthuse about the use of the technology in teaching and learning. Mobile technology could help us achieve the last mile of access to the Net and to a vast range of learning resources available in digital form, and also create “digital bridges” for access to education. The volume of literature on mobile learning in the last decade is significant, with (for instance) “mlearn” conferences every year since 2001.

However, the literature is full of descriptive, observation-based and logical reasoning oriented papers relating to the use of mobile technologies for learning. Various projects have looked at mobile for different types of learning scenario, and it is hard to use those for developing a theory of mobile learning because of their limitations—sample size and type, technology, research methods, and so on. This book by Vavpula, Pachler and Kukulska-Hulme provides a discussion of the methods and tools used in researching this new area of learning with technology discussed in 21 chapters under five sections: introduction, frameworks, methods, research designs, and way forward.

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Part IV has four chapters to discuss research designs in mobile learning. Chapter 16 describes developing a participatory research design using mobile devices for data collection on the use of mobile technology for learners with disabilities. Chapter 17 uses Research 2.0 as a metaphor to discuss the Open-Learn initiative of the UK Open University. Chapter 18 presents a combination of ethnographic methods, participatory design and prototype analyses to discuss the design and development of a wiki-based learning environment. Chapter 19 provides a comprehensive view of research methods including questionnaire, observation, log file and interviews in a triangulation approach to study mobile learning use by the learners.

In the last part of the book, first Vavoula presents the summary of a one-day workshop organised by the editors of this book in December 2007. The major issues identified include the need for more longitudinal research for theory building, demonstrating evidence of learning using mobile technologies, use of learners as co-researchers, and research ethics in the context of invasion of the privacy of the subjects. In the last chapter, Agnes Kukulska-Hulme summarises the important points of the book:

- Research should be in tune with new thinking about learning.
- Research should consider the impact of context.
- Research should consider different types of data and analysis.
- Research should involve learners as co-designers and co-researchers.

As mobile learning becomes a global phenomenon, Kukulska-Hulme concludes that "it is also necessary to bear in mind that 'western' research approaches and methods are not always relevant and appropriate when studying mobile learning in other parts of the world ... Alternative perspectives can enrich our conceptions of contexts and may eventually lead to improved ways of researching mobile learning." (p 361).

In the preamble to the book, Pachler says that "... we very much hope, and believe, it offers a sound foundation for members of the discipline to build on and to develop and refine the methodological repertoire for the field of mobile learning" (p 13). While I agree with Pachler, I would emphasise that the book does not tell us all we need to know about mobile learning research. It should be a starting point for thinking about researching mobile learning, and would be useful for educational technologists and project managers engaged in mobile learning. You can also use it as a textbook for research methods in educational technology.

Sanjaya Mishra (received December 2009)
Reader in Distance Education, Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India
sanjayamishra@hotmail.com