Reviews

Campbell, Katy (2006) *E-ffective writing for e-learning environments* Information Science (Hershey PA) ISBN 1-59904-326-2 240 pp $59.95
www.idea-group.com   *cust@idea-group.com*

This volume contains, in effect, two tightly linked publications. The first part is an instructional text which thoroughly covers all aspects of the process of instructional design for the e-learning environment. The second is a handbook to support active learning on the part of the reader, together with some additional supporting resource material. Thus, readers are referred to part two (at times somewhat disjointedly), from the instruction on design in part one, to the activities which they should undertake, in the midst of the process. This arrangement has the disadvantage that the reader must skip back and forward, if resolved to be active and to consolidate and develop learning. Equally it has the advantage that the text (to which the reader may well refer later), is more streamlined than it would have been had it encompassed the worksheets and the record of immediate activity.

The writer is clearly committed to instructional designing, and to moderately authoritative instruction to promote learning. She applies sound principles within her book in so doing, ensures adequate coverage of her topic, and has produced a volume which is far from basic or trivial, and is distinctly reader-friendly, with an attractive and open layout. It is well supplied with references throughout, although the entire book is strongly directed towards, and refers to, the markets and current practices in the United States and Canada. A minor reservation, which I do not believe is trivial, is the stress Katy Campbell lays on the desirable use of red as a colour for that which is important in text and visuals. There is virtually no mention of the problems which this can create for colour-blind users.

This will nevertheless be a useful text for those who wish to engage with sound quality stan-dard instruction in the e-learning environment, and who wish to access their advice and develop their understanding of it through material contained in one volume.

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Jackson, Norman *et al* ed (2006) *Developing creativity in higher education* Routledge (Abingdon UK & New York) ISBN 0-415-36532-5 236 pp £24.99
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What is encompassed in *Developing creativity in higher education*? Are we concerned with developing creativity in relevant teachers, students, processes, and/or curricula; with pedagogic practice and/or theory; with institutional practice and/or public policy? The answer turns out to be "all of them and more" and all in little more than 200 pages. A daunting task, but this edited volume does all these topics justice to a remarkable extent. A shift towards more creative curricula will require changes in both content and method of teaching and learning, and even though the topic of educational technology in all its aspects does not appear explicitly, it is implicit in every chapter of the book.

Academics pride themselves on being creative in their research; they are less likely to take the same view towards their teaching. It is therefore good to have a chapter on "Developing higher education teachers to teach creatively" based on the huge experience of the Staff and Educational Development Association. There is full recognition of the need for not only students but also staff to be creative and there are outstanding chapters on "Developing students' creativity" and on how to assess creativity. There is even an account of a research study on facilitating creativity in higher education. In view of the deadening influence on

creativity of UK's Quality Assurance Agency (through its insistence on detailed pre-specifications of learning outcomes), it is good to see a stress on the importance of creativity as public policy. This is particularly so as there is a sound balance here between the views of Government and of the maverick President of the Royal Society, Lord May, supported by Fullan's "Policy makers will have to design policy levers which give them less control than they would like."

In a final chapter, Jackson links creativity to what traditional academics are most associated with—disciplinary knowledge—but it is significant that the highly relevant quote "I don't teach: what I do is to help people see" comes from the chapter on art and design. It is from that area that academics in traditional disciplines can derive most inspiration, if they want to make teaching and learning in their discipline more biased towards creativity. However, the links between this feature and issues of change—institutional, disciplinary, pedagogic—could have been more fully explored.

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In the postmodern world, it has ceased to be surprising that different "truths" are served up to different audiences. Even so, it should surely cause some alarm when academic psychologists have developed one methodological and theoretical framework for human and animal learning, but specialist texts on teaching undergraduates (eg Ramsden, 2003) employ another, and books dealing with adult education yet a third ... —especially as all three frameworks seem to present themselves as empirically true. Peter Jarvis has published prolifically on learning in adult education, and is very popular on the "workshop circuit". His theory of learning has "emerged from [his]

own research over the past twenty years", and Jarvis tells us that "about two hundred adults and their own understanding of their learning processes constituted the basis of this research" (p 20).

Jarvis's methodology consists of presenting workshop participants with Kolb's diagram of the learning cycle and asking them to suggest how it should be modified in the light of a recalled "learning incident from their own lives" (p 8). The methodology is unashamedly introspective: "because in order to get into the subjects' minds it is necessary for them to describe their own mental functioning—there is no other way to understand it" (p 9). The theory that emerges is that "when my biography and my interpretation of the immediate world are not in harmony" (a state Jarvis calls "disjuncture"), learning switches on, to re-synchronise matters. According to Jarvis, learning is the process by which the self develops: "I learn to be me" (p 50).

In Jarvis's view, "the fact that learning is the single most significant element moulding our being suggests that all the different theories of learning should be able to be understood within a comprehensive framework" (Preface, p xi). This is not an auspicious beginning. The fact that x is "the most significant element" of y does not imply that x is a unitary phenomenon, explicable by a single theory (consider, for example: "economics is the most significant element of practical politics": does this suggest there can be a single theory of all economic phenomena?). And whether all of the diverse theories of x (most of them, one assumes, false) can be accommodated within what presumably would be a comprehensive meta-theory, is a separate question altogether (and not really one of much interest). Despite setting out on the back of a *non sequitur*, it is still a little surprising to find Jarvis glumly confessing only a page later that: "the final conclusion to this study is that we do not know enough about human learning to be able to produce a comprehensive theory. In fact we might never know enough to be able to do so" (Preface, p xii).

It is easy to see how Jarvis's views are heady and stimulating intellectual fodder for workshops, and certainly learners must feel empow-

ered by being treated as the ultimate and privileged sources of knowledge about learning. Jarvis is intellectually eclectic on a grand scale, and attempts to contextualise his views within existentialist philosophy, phenomenology, social anthropology, psycho-analysis, and many other schemes of thought. All of this is accomplished with great zest and verve.

In the face of all the fireworks and exhilaration, it seems almost niggardly to come back to truth. But, considered as a contribution to science, Jarvis's book is a poor thing. Whilst his title describes a quest for a theory, it seems from the book that Jarvis has very little idea of what a theory is (based on data, a source of prediction-yielding hypotheses, open to falsification etc), and in fact he seems to be trying to provide a lexical definition (see p 13). Reliance on introspective methods carries all of the well-known drawbacks (very young children do most learning, but can't introspect; introspections can't be challenged because I can't have your conscious experiences; animals can't introspect and don't have selves so can't be said to learn etc). And far from dealing comprehensively with learning, Jarvis seems to restrict the term to what psychologists call "insight learning" (which is actually treated by psychologists as a case of problem solving rather than one of learning). It might be intellectually exciting to focus on "learning what it is to be me", but what about learning skills through painstaking practice? Acquiring the vocabulary of a second language? Revising for an examination? These are all important forms of learning, but none of them involves "biographical disjuncture", and none of them is seriously treated by Jarvis.

In addition to his contributions to the adult learning literature, Jarvis is an ordained minister, and this may explain why he sometimes seems to confuse the evaluation of public knowledge with the production of personal witness texts. For example, a quotation from Harré to the effect that "the self ... is a site from which a person perceives the world" is followed by a "True!" of congratulatory endorsement from Jarvis (p 46). Much more worryingly, Jarvis was told by a "pregnant North American First Nation Person" that "my people teach us to talk to unborn babies in the womb". "They recognised", he tells us, "the significance of the unborn creating preconscious memories in the brain" (p 43). 'Recognised' is a success word (you can't recognise what isn't true), so Jarvis is implicitly endorsing the idea that talking to pre-linguistic foetuses promotes prenatal learning. Of course, within Jarvis's framework, he could only know this if one such foetus had managed to introspect and report the result in a modified Kolb diagram. Perhaps he will describe this study in a future book.

Reference

Ramsden, Paul (2003) *Learning to teach in higher education* (second edition) RoutledgeFalmer London

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Amongst the volumes of literature on "no significant difference" and "media do not influence learning", the book under review provides us a body of knowledge to think about, reflect on, and use in practice. Koumi is one of those educational television producers who always believed that appropriate design should result in improved learning from television and video. These producers believe in the power of visuals and moving images, coupled with sound and animations, to create rich learning materials for the students. It is common knowledge that images in television, video and multimedia are strong source for attracting viewers' attention and providing diverse meaning-making opportunities. The book by Koumi provides a blend of both theory and practice of designing video and multimedia for learning, though it emphasises open and flexible learning. The author provides a framework for research on media, particularly for media comparison studies in chapter 4. This should also be useful to decide on which medium to use for which teaching functions.

The book is divided into four broad parts and eight chapters. Part I includes Chapters 1, 2

and 3, which discuss the strength of video to assist in learning and skill development; provide vicarious experiences; and nurture motivations and feelings. Part II has one chapter—on matching media attributes to learning. Part III offers Chapters 5 and 6 and describes screenwriting principles for video, while Part IV (with Chapters 7 and 8) covers what Koumi calls "audiovision" (a term, that even foxes Google, for printed text and pictures working with broadcast or recorded sound) and multimedia. The author provides a study guide on how to use these chapters and emphasises the target audience.

The book has high practical value with examples and illustrations. Koumi has actually attempted the most difficult task of explaining visuals in words and figures without the use of moving video samples in a cd. The value of this book would have increased manifold with an accompanying cd covering all the examples it covers. Koumi is aware of this as a limitation of copyright restrictions. Nevertheless he has used his skills of educational television screenplay writing to express the complexities in print!

While Koumi has been successful in building a theoretical framework, much of what has been discussed here is based on experiential learning at the UK Open University Production Centre. Some of the significant contributions of this book are

- 27 categories of video techniques and teaching functions;
- a framework for media comparison studies;
- a ten-point pedagogic screenwriting framework with 46 techniques; and
- guidelines for "audiovision" and multimedia preparation.

Though the guidelines for multimedia are useful, it would have been better to offer a detailed account of the unique properties of multimedia and how scriptwriting for multimedia is different from that for video—as the use of multimedia is increasing fast. At a time when there is pressure to increase the number of video productions, and the use of live television to record and quickly develop programmes as adopted in many distance teaching institutions, this book could have provided much needed guidelines on producing

effective live television programmes and use of television clippings in live (synchronous) broadcast programmes. Nevertheless, the book is a must for educational television producers, course developers in distance teaching institutions, and anyone interested in the use of video and multimedia in teaching and learning. The guidelines in this book should make educational television more interesting and pedagogically useful, and initiate appropriate research designs to show its effectiveness.

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Levy, Yair (2006) *Assessing the value of e-learning systems* Information Science (Hershey PA) ISBN 1-59140-727-3 284 pp $69.95
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If you think that people should evaluate an e-learning system on more than whether the learners like it or learn from it, this may be the book for you. You should be willing to read what looks like an unexpurgated PhD thesis, with 34 pages of technical appendices. Yair Levy, based at Nova Southeastern University in Florida, is an assistant professor of management information systems: his bias shows. For him, one must assess the value of an e-learning system against many criteria, including its reliability, network availability, student-to-student interactions, instructor-to-student interactions, quality of technical support, and so on. His literature search yields 48 criteria, but is weakened by his acceptance of a very broad range of technologies and student activities as constituting e-learning. Early e-learning was pre-Internet; later e-learning was pre-virtual learning environments; and yesterday's e-learning was pre-podcasting. His desire to put everything under the single term of "e-learning" merely illustrates pitfalls for researchers in this rapidly changing field, in which "online courses" differ widely.

Levy developed a Learners' Value Index of Satisfaction, asked 644 students taking online courses in 2003 at his university to use it, then

statistically analysed the data from 192 usable returns, mainly to establish the credibility of his Index as a benchmarking tool. He claims four contributions: first, to information systems staff by identifying, defining and articulating the relationship between value and satisfaction constructs. Second, he provides guidelines to researchers on the process of gathering data from learners about e-learning system characteristics that they value and find important. Third, he provides statistical techniques for analysing the data. Fourth, he has developed and validated tools to indicate learners' perception of the value of e-learning systems.

This book is likely to be of greatest interest to information systems staff rather than to educational technologists or specialists in other disciplines.

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Lim, Cher Ping (2006) *The science and art of integrating ICT in Singapore schools* iT21 (Singapore) ISBN 981-05-5842-2 184 pp S$45

Singapore has long touted itself as one of the world's leading information societies—an position which has been furthered by a combination of aggressive national policymaking and a relative lack of the geographic, demographic, economic and political barriers which have frustrated the efforts of larger, less authoritarian nations. Lim Cher Ping's brief but thorough investigation of the science and art (or more accurately rhetoric and reality) of integrating ICT in Singapore schools therefore provides a pertinent comparative case study for those in developing and developed countries seeking to follow the Singaporean vision of a fully-technologised education system.

Dr Lim (a Singaporean former teacher now working in Australia's Edith Cowan University) utilises a socio-cultural framework to explore what he terms the "effective" and "ineffective" implementation of ICT in the country's schools. This theoretical perspective is then brought to bear upon a series of interview

and observation-based case studies conducted in ten "high ICT integration" schools between 2000 and 2003. The resulting analysis allows Lim to highlight some key issues, not least the importance of teachers' perceptions of the opportunities of ICT and the crucial mediating role of wider activity systems (such as external systems of examination). Indeed, throughout the course of the investigation, teachers (and the many barriers they face) emerge as pivotal in the eventual (non)use of ICT in the classroom. Lim concludes sensibly that, only if activity systems in schools are designed with the strengths and limitations of ICT in mind, will the many opportunities of ICT be taken up by teachers.

As such, Lim is able to provide some neat empirical confirmation of many factors now acknowledged by educational technologists around the world. Yet his analysis is also coloured by some distinctly Singaporean issues—such as the exaggeratedly instructional teacher/learner relationship and overt emphasis on high-stakes examinations. Thus, whilst this book is not a ground-breaking treatise, it provides a tidy examination of the practicalities of ICT integration in a setting which would ostensibly appear conducive to the implementation of ICT.

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Millar, Robin *et al* ed (2006) *Improving subject teaching* Routledge (Abingdon UK & New York) ISBN 0-415-36210-5 210 pp £21.99
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"A justifiable criticism of much science education research is that it identifies the problem and then stops." (p 166)

This book tries to bridge the gap between research and improving teaching practices. Although its examples come from science teaching, it is relevant across all subject areas. The authors, whilst convinced that applied research findings could significantly improve student learning and attitudes, distinguish throughout between evidence-informed inter-

ventions that may not have been formally evaluated and shown to "work" (p 11) and evidence-based interventions in which research has shown outcomes to be improved. Despite a variety of authors, the book presents a cohesive whole with clear threads running throughout: it has been well planned. Chapters 2–4 address the question of "What shall we teach?" whilst Chapters 5–7 discuss what research can tell us about the outcomes of teaching which has been research-informed. Will it become evidence-based because it is successful in its outcomes?

A three-stage Delphi study was chosen to elicit participants' views and there was found to be a high level of agreement on the features of a basic knowledge and understanding about science. Diagnostic question banks explicitly informed by research were created for three areas where misconceptions are rife: electrical circuits, particles and change, and plant nutrition. A social constructivist view is taken of the teaching process with interactive and dialogic communication encouraged. The fact that one of the three worked examples did not appear to succeed is rather quickly dismissed and "provides a stark illustration of the difficulties involved in drawing upon research findings to inform practice." (p 98)

The diagnostic questions provided were used by a self-selected group of teachers and were "a kind of Trojan Horse" (p 113). They were familiar enough to fit into current practice but then challenged it through the data they generated. The authors also acknowledge that two different views of the purposes of science lessons were being presented (p 118): one a means of conveying understanding of established scientific knowledge, and the other an exploration of what that knowledge should be. There seems to be an uneasy truce between these two throughout the book. "Perhaps one reason why research and practitioner communities do not interact better is that they are often interested in somewhat different outcomes" (p 165).

The book makes the point that new and old teaching interventions cannot be directly compared as they do not have the same objectives—and it argues against randomised clinical trials as being the best approach in the

educational sector. The writers are not unduly optimistic in their conclusions—here we have a brave attempt by researchers to try to find ways of improving student knowledge and understanding by giving teachers a range of tools with which to convert evidence-informed learning into that which is evidence-based.

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This book has eleven chapters in three sections:

1. Framing educational research inquiry to meet today's realities
2. Basic issues when addressing human behaviour: an experimental research perspective
3. Producing credible applied educational research

Apart from a chapter on "Obstacles to educational reform" by Richard Mayer (author of *Multimedia learning*, 2001, Cambridge University Press), just about the only link with learning technologies in the book is a swipe at the proliferation of them: "despite their expense, rapid obsolescence, and outstandingly poor record of inspiring competent scientific research on effectiveness in promoting learning." (p 41) Readers might think this is not much to justify this title's place in *BJET* reviews. Think back though to Rushby and Cowan's September 2006 editorial which lamented high rejection rates and challenged any hopeful authors to aim higher. If you are unsure what that might entail, a few chapters of this book would be advisable.

According to the rear cover blurb it is suitable for use by "educational researchers, educators, administrators and policy-makers ...". Several contributors want a raising of the evidence-based bar by *everyone* involved in education. But if it's ten years since you grappled with

Statistics without tears, some chapters will be inaccessibly dense. In fairness, Levin's Chapter 1 tries to ease us in with the help of a courtroom drama—but I preferred O'Donnell's chapter 10 as less contrived and would recommend starting there.

There is a singularly American focus and rationale to this book—don't expect to find Pawson and Tilly treated here, or, for that matter, any other brand of evaluation, apart from the narrowly empirical. With the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) in the USA, developers seeking federal funding have to produce "scientifically based research" to back up their claims of effectiveness (see www.w-w-c.org). Randomised-controlled trials (RCT) are not called the "gold standard" in research evidence for nothing—they can be intoxicatingly costly and complex to bring to fruition. Safe to say that many education conferences would be lonely affairs if their review committees took the NCLB line and admitted only papers backed by RCTs. As an indication, if resources are tight, Levin (Chapter 1) recommends that experiments can still render useful results with "just" fourteen classrooms.

Phye concludes chapter 9 by analogising that a limited research repertoire is as detrimental to an aspirant educational researcher as a limited musical repertoire is to an aspiring musician. This does not mean we are all meant to achieve *expertise* across the repertoire though. Even the authors of a book as emphatically pro-empirical research as this would admit that the research question is what determines the research methodology. I came to this book with a bias against "numbers" and leave it with heightened respect for them.

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The editors of this comprehensive and up-to-date book are careful to stress from the outset (although not quite in these terms) that there are umpteen versions of problem-based learning (pbl), let alone of online pbl; and that within the latter group, the extent to which use of networked facilities is blended with face-to-face contact also varies markedly, with significant implications for those who design and deliver online pbl. Consequently, it would be an understatement to say that they and their readers are confronted with a subject area in which there are marked and significant differences between face-to-face pbl and online pbl, to which coverage and detailed attention should be given adequately. Land and Bayne suggest in their chapter that pbl itself is a chaotic and disquieting way of learning. Equally, readers seeking to follow a particular line of enquiry in relation to a particular style of online pbl may well feel that this description could be applied to their search within the book's pages for the advice, research and modules which are available there, and which will be of use to them. Fortunately, they are assisted thoughtfully in their searching. The text has been carefully assembled with the reader, or rather with a variety of readers with a variety of experiences, in mind.

The editors declare clearly in their introduction that their purpose is to "provide research-based information about the realities of setting up and running problem-based learning (online) across disciplines and countries". This they do, in my judgement—and do so thoroughly and usefully. They are also committed to grapple with the various complex and highly relevant issues which have already emerged in such settings. These include the extent to which direction should be offered to students about what they are expected to do, and when—and how. In different places and with usefully varied vocabulary and models, the text similarly engages with what Jennings calls the requirement in a pbl pedagogy for "a synchronous spark to engage learners"; and what the editors point out is the "emerging importance of synchronous discussion" to online pbl.

The writers of individual chapters have clearly been facilitated by the editors to provide a composite source which should enable readers to pursue their own interests and study, having been given a flying start within these pages. For the readers are effectively assisted to find

what they seek, and guided clearly and helpfully—first by the initial introduction and then by the advance organisers for each of the four separate sections. All are useful reading and do not follow the customary and somewhat banal approach in many collections of assorted readings, where the editors simply describe in advance what any intelligent reader can deduce from the table of contents. Here, rather, are thoughtful and useful advance organisers to study within the book, and within each section.

The chapters are grouped in sections which deal comprehensively with the challenges inherent in pbl online; facilitation of learning through online technologies; the development and application of problem-based pedagogy; and the possibilities rapidly emerging as the technology and its users develop. Many readers may wish to begin their reading other than at the beginning, perhaps in the third section, or elsewhere. That approach created no problems for me, at least.

If you are yourself interested to initiate or develop online pbl, I would not quite advise you to read this book—other than for a fairly quick skim to identify what it has to offer you. I would instead advise you to *use* it, to follow the guidance which the editors offer in their highlighting and headlining, and thus to identify and draw on the information and thinking which it contains, and on the sources which it will identify for you, in relation to your own interests and concerns. I would expect that you would read parts of it carefully and put them to good use, as your activities and interests move you. I am implying, of course, that this is a book for you to purchase and to own—and not merely to borrow—and to annotate if that is your style, and above all to return to, as a valued and valuable mini-library on this important subject.

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

Brophy, Jere & **Pinnegar, Stefinee** ed (2005) *Learning from research on teaching: Perspective, methodology and representation* Elsevier (Burlington MA & London) ISBN 0762-3125-8 428 pp $94.95
elsevier.nl   *bookreview@elsevier.nl*

This is the eleventh volume of Elsevier's "Advances in research on teaching" series. Its predecessors have ranged very widely over the field, but maybe this is the most important so far. That's because it is the first volume specifically to address the whole purpose of research—the application of the research outcomes. That's not to say that the previous ten books have been published from ivory castles—but this one is explicit about the need to apply research data and findings. As well as that, it is explicit about applying those in the contexts of teacher education and training (both pre-service and in-service). In particular, that is because the learners the "teaching" of the title is about are trainee teachers.

However, do not think that all that explicitness makes this a book that is easy to work through or to learn from. It is not easy to work with as it consists of a number of rather disparate papers from a number of word processors in the US (well, plus one in Israel and a tiny few in Canada); the editors attempt to squeeze those papers into three chunks (and succeed to an extent), but there is no overview … and no index.

The three parts are—as the sub-title tells us—Perspective (Whom should I ask when doing my surveys?); Methodology (How should I carry out the research?), and Representation (How should I display what I find?). That taxonomy is tortuous, to say the least, and, overall, it is very hard to find much that is exciting about learning from research on teaching.

Ireson, Gren & **Twidle, John** (2006) *Secondary science: Reflective reader* Learning Matters (Exeter UK) ISBN 1-84445-065-1 121 pp £16
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This is the second "Reflective reader" to receive notice in these pages—a couple of issues ago (**37**(5)), we looked at the primary school

science companion. This book is just as good, and takes over from the other by addressing the needs of trainee teachers of science from Year / Grade 7. Both form part of Learning Matters's great "Achieving Qualified Teacher Status" series. To reach QTS, a trainee teacher in England and Wales must spend a lot of time in the classroom—reflecting on that experience in the light of education theory met away from the classroom. The book therefore presents more education theory—that's the "reader" part, with plenty of chunks of text (anything between very short and quite long, but always readable), each chunk coming with triggers for thinking and discussing in and out of school (the "reflective" part).

The readings and the reflection triggers come in eleven chapters, whose topics at once show that this book is thoughtful and practical, comprehensive and well developed. Those topics are lesson planning; working with different learning styles; meeting additional needs; assessment; planning investigations (experiments); health and safety; the purpose of practical work (maybe this should have appeared earlier in the book?); the nature of science; cross-curricular themes ; thinking skills; and carrying out classroom research. The book opens with a brief but effective Introduction and closes with a lengthy list of references and a very good index. Indeed, it is a very good book.

Loughran, John (2006) *Developing a pedagogy of teacher education* Routledge (Abingdon UK & New York) ISBN 0-415-36727-1 197 pp £21.99
tandf.co.uk enquiry@tandf.co.uk

This unusual and very important book explores exactly what its title and sub-title ("Understanding teaching and learning about teaching") describe. That is: what do we mean by, and how can we approach, quality of learning, teaching and assessment when the learners are student teachers and (in some places) their teachers have no experience of or training in teaching or teacher education?

The book is in two roughly equal parts, matching that sub-title. First (after a thoughtful Introduction), there are five chapters about the

teachers in this context. Here, Loughran reminds us with much force that a teacher trainer has two crucial but inconsistent roles and needs much expertise and experience in each. Unlike tutors in other contexts, teacher trainers should first be very good teachers of the content (skills, knowledge and understanding) of the subjects the learners are learning about (eg science, technology, English ...). And, second, they should be very good teachers about teaching—not passing on tips and showing how to use an interactive white board, but going under the skin of the craft so the learners learn what teaching is really about. Such a combination is so rare that many schools of education accept that they must employ two separate groups of teachers.

Part II offers six chapters (though the sixth is really a separate Conclusion for the book as a whole) about the learners in this context. Again, the learners have competing roles: they must learn their subjects and they must learn how to be adequate teachers who know how to improve. Of course, they learn the latter subliminally from their subject tutors as well as in education classes ... . As it should be, Part II is even better than Part I, and it is a pity that Loughran did not put learning before teaching, despite the problems that doing this sometimes leads to.

Of course, quality in education is about more than quality of learning and of teaching: quality assessment should be at the core of both. It is a second pity that this book says next to nothing about that.

O'Donoghue, John ed (2006) *Technology-supported learning and teaching* Information Science (Hershey PA) ISBN 1-59140-963-2 335 pp $74.95
www.idea-group.com cust@idea-group.com

This "Staff perspective" (to quote the sub-title) is a collection of nineteen papers on the potential of, and (more importantly) the issues around, different aspects of educational technology in the modern higher education classroom. Yes, including the virtual classroom—much of the educational technology here concerns hardware and software as tools to

improve learning and teaching rather than a philosophy of approach to improved learning and teaching.

The book's editor is based in UK but currently working in Australia—that seems to help him bring an unusually international perspective to the product: though the book is very clearly US-published, half the writers of the papers work in the UK, with the rest coming from (in order) Australia, Hong Kong and Ireland. Their nineteen contributions are papers rather than chapters as there's little attempt to link them together, let alone have them develop any kind of conversation. But they are all good— well planned, well developed, well written— and, between them, they cover a lot of ground of interest to secondary and post-secondary teachers as well as to those in universities. The papers come in three groups based on the issues mainly addressed—context issues (five papers, looking mainly at the use of virtual learning environments (vles) and online learning systems); educational ones (eight, mainly about blending online and vle-based learning with more face-to-face work); and technological issues (five, from online learning to using streamed video). Hmm—"online" seems to appear throughout, and it does; maybe the issues-based categorisation is a wee bit artificial.

Rowling, John R & **Willis, Wyll** (2006) *Climbing towards excellence* Trentham (Stoke on Trent & Stirling VA) ISBN 1-85856-383-6 123 pp 16.99
trentham-books.co.uk   tb@trentham-books.co.uk

This book for teachers and school managers is explicitly concerned with raising standards of attainment and achievement in the public GCSE exams that mark the end of Year/Grade 11 in the UK (except Scotland). The cover illustration is a fine photo of someone on top of a snowy lump of rock—except that it seems to come from a cellphone, so doesn't have the same cachet of excellence as Hillary and Tensing atop Everest (near where your reviewer happens to be sitting) fifty years ago.

There are plenty of books around nowadays that strive to encapsulate the qualities of the most effective learning, teaching, and assess-

ment. This one is not as good as many in er not saying much of value about assessment, which is so essential for quality learning and teaching. And it has no index. And it's rather loaded with what one might call Gospel rhetoric ("Is it worth it [the effort]? Ask So-and-so at Such-and-such School ... . Next year it might be you ... . Is it worth it? The smile alone is ...").

But it's very loaded with the best of tips of good practice from many of those other such books. And nowhere does it say what everyone knows—that the best way to get the best exam results is to cram the learners with ultra-focussed facts.

Seale, Jane K (2006) *E-learning and disability in higher education* Routledge (Abingdon UK & New York) ISBN 0-415-38310-2 240 pp £22.99
tandf.co.uk   enquiry@tandf.co.uk

Here is a very timely book (though even more timely would be such a careful and thoughtful coverage on disabled students in conventional classrooms, labs and libraries). The author's main area is educational innovation, though she has a strong proactive interest in barriers to learning and assistive technology ... but, of course, overcoming students' disabilities at university would indeed be educational innovation. UK's recent innovative legislation—the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act—provides a powerful push, of course.

Seale sets the scene with a deliciously readable introduction—that's another educational innovation—before moving into more detail in three chapters on "where are we now?". The bulk of the book, called "Surveying the scene", offers half a dozen chapters from various viewpoints; all six are very well focussed on what's at the centre of the scene being surveyed. Almost as bulky, but rather more bitty, are the closing chapters—they are called "conceptualising", but really here we look together at ways forward.

To close, one must return to the thought in the brackets in the opening sentence. Is there not a danger that linking e-learning and disability so closely would incline higher education tutors—and, more dangerously, the

accountants—to think the former is the solution to the latter? The danger comes not just from the title—the book as a whole is very well aligned to its stated subject, but there's too much concentration on using modern technologies to improve the learning of those with such barriers and not enough on inclusivity and integration.

Slattery, Patrick (2006) *Curriculum development in the post-modern era* Routledge (Abingdon UK & New York) ISBN 0-415-95338-3 330 pp £19.99
tandf.co.uk   *enquiry@tandf.co.uk*

Over ten years after the first edition, this one appears. The ten years have been momentous, we are told, in that the field of curriculum development has "exploded" ... and "the landscape of American schooling has changed dramatically." What do people mean by postmodern education? It is the view of the curriculum that sees the past (ie the modern) as exclusive, particularly WASPishly exclusive, the future as fully inclusive, and the present (post-modern times) as having us stumble (or explode?) into the future.

It also sees texts such as this one (we must assume it is typical) with

- nothing on educational technology or computers—though there is much debate about equality of access to such things in our world, and much about "haves and have-nots";
- chapter headings like "The hermeneutic circle and the interpretive process", which is a bit tautologous; and
- entries in the detailed index like "queer theory" (with a major and a minor reference).

As Umberto Eco (quoted on Page 281) says, "with the post-modern, it is possible not to understand the game [sic] and yet to take it seriously."

So what is to be the "curriculum ... in the postmodern era"? No definition leaps from these pages, even in the final chapter which describes a vision of this. However, in that chapter there are implications that the postmodern curriculum is more interactive, more

learner-centred, less accepting of traditional divisive values, more about process than about content. Maybe your reviewer is too old to turn away from the curriculum development model that has served so well, including in these pages, for three decades?

Unsworth, Len (2006) *E-literature for children* Routledge (Abingdon UK & New York) ISBN 0-415-33330-X 174 pp £22.50
tandf.co.uk   *enquiry@tandf.co.uk*

For children, the most significant difference between IT-based reading ("literature" is not the best word) and what *we* were brought up with is the interactivity of the former, mainly, but not only, through graphics. For adults—in particular, teachers and parents—the most significant difference is the non-linearity that tempts young readers along unexpected routes. This book's title is not fully clear—nor is the sub-title, Enhancing digital literacy learning—but the purpose is clear: to try to apply the opportunities of the new approaches to help children learn to read well and with enjoyment and understanding. Yes, and to avoid the threats.

Unsworth's approach is far from a theoretical one, but he does not draw strong conclusions. His message is clear too, though—that interactive, branching narratives (yes, even adventure games) are not a waste of space and time, but something with huge potential that teachers at all levels and all subjects would do well to explore.

van Keuren, James (2006) *Web-based instruction* Rowman & Littlefield (Lanham MD & Oxford) ISBN 1-57886-443-7 97 pp £11.99
rowmanlittlefield.com

This is a strange little book in several ways, even though it is one that is easy to read in an hour or two and provides a good number of useful thoughts. The word "instruction" in the title, for instance, is one not often found in UK education—but also not often found anywhere in the context of web-based working. (It has various adverse implications, to Brits at least,

such as lack of learner-centredness and lack of interactivity.) Then there's the sub-title—"A practical guide for online courses"—which seems to address the book at the courses rather than at the course developers to whom van Keuren really speaks. And then there's the sometimes uneven style, which makes the reader at some points unsure of the direction of the text. (There's a chapter called "Don't drop the ball", for instance, which seems to be about accountability and consistency.)

The author rightly distinguishes between web-based (online) and web-assisted (blended) courses throughout the book, and, throughout the book, emphasises that in either case we are moving from face-to-face towards open and distance learning. Despite the implications of "instruction", the book is generally quite sensitive to the learners—there is exceptional guidance on meeting the special needs of learners with a range of disabilities, for instance, and plenty on making sure that the tutor keeps in close touch with emails and the online forum and bulletin board. And there is some useful material in the appendices, a brief but adequate glossary, and a references list (but, sadly, no index).