

Reviews

Boud, David *et al* ed (2001) *Peer Learning in Higher Education* Kogan Page, London (& Stylus, Sterling VA) ISBN 0-7494-3612-3 184 pp £19.99
 kogan-page.co.uk kpinfo@kogan-page.co.uk

The Faculty at the Sydney University of Technology are to be congratulated on having produced, under the leadership of David Boud, this most useful *vade mecum* on peer learning in higher education, which covers many of its diverse manifestations. The first part—“Basic considerations”—covers design, strategy, implementation and assessment, while the second provides case studies in several different disciplines. This latter would have been more helpful if the disciplines had included some of the more orthodox ones, for these are possibly more in need of innovative approaches than the more recent additions to the academic canon.

The book is clearly intended for the convinced, or at least the easily convincible. Thus it does not provide ammunition to be used against sceptics who consider peer learning a form of the “blind leading the blind”, so graphically illustrated by Breughel. Can I recommend that the second edition has that picture as its frontispiece and then explains why Breughel was wrong?

More seriously, the book does not ground its proposed practices in basic theory. Not only is that a pity, because higher education pedagogy has long risen above the cookery book approach (however useful that is), but it would have made it clearer that peer learning is just one of several and mutually supportive ways of making students’ lives more interesting and more profitable.

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Fairbairn, Gavin & Fairbairn, Susan (2001) *Reading at University* OU Press, Buckingham (& Philadelphia PA) ISBN 0-335-20385-x 209 pp £12.99 (boards £45)
 openup.co.uk enquiries@openup.co.uk

The irony had not escaped me when I first received this book and, glancing at the back, observed “Are you overwhelmed by the sheer amount that you have to read? ... [then] this is the book for you!” Having studied both at “traditional” university and by distance learning as a postgraduate, I always found the amount of reading involved to be a problem, so I was interested to see what this book has to offer to me as a student.

It has a broad appeal: from sixth formers to postgraduates. The style is generally light, and (in particular) the authors regularly intersperse the more serious aspects of the material with interesting or amusing examples to keep the reader’s attention.

The volume aims to emphasise the importance of reading to any student and outlines the value of spending time and effort on improving one’s reading skills in terms of academic benefits. It addresses the concern that there is too little time available for reading at university, and aims to equip readers with coping strategies for the overload of written material they may experience. I guess we can all benefit from that...

The authors have organised the chapters such that the first two allow you to evaluate yourself in this skills area. The following six deal with how and when to read, in order to obtain the maximum benefits from the exercise, and the final two discuss how these skills can be put into practice. Throughout the book there are short exercises for you to complete to encourage you to think actively and become involved in the ideas. I have to admit that these did not work for me, as I tend to read in the bath or other such places and tend not to have writing materials handy!

There are some interesting ideas and questions raised by this work, although my reading has not become faster or more efficient as a result of it. Advice such as looking for key words in sentences, or how to move one's eyes across the page could be of use to someone who has negligible reading skills. The chapter on evaluating texts and referencing could be of value to university students, as it encourages maturity and independence of thought and how to use other people's ideas correctly. I also enjoyed the section on using reading lists: I had often found my eyes goggling at the amount I was expected to plough through at university. There are also ideas on summarising text that could be very helpful to someone trying to write an essay, to prepare a presentation, or to comprehend a particularly complex topic.

This book is, in essence, a self-help manual for students that may be concerned with how to read at university level. The format is user-friendly, and the exercises will certainly provide a focus for the various sections, condensing the ideas and drawing the reader in. I would recommend it to anyone who is on their way to university to study and has little experience of reading independently, or to an undergraduate who is finding him/herself bamboozled by literature.

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Muijs, Daniel & Reynolds, David (2001)
Effective Teaching Paul Chapman, London (& Sage, Thousand Oaks CA) ISBN 0-7619-6881-4 244 pp £16.99 (boards £50)

paulchapmanpublishing.co.uk
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Suitable for trainee and established teachers who wish to review their classroom practices, this is a well written and interesting book. The emphasis is on academic research of various areas of education, from established controversies such as streaming/setting to newer and less well studied areas such as maximising the achievement of gifted students.

The strongest feature of the book is that discussion is always well balanced: arguments for and against certain approaches are put forward without bias. The information is ordered into well structured chapters which allow the reader to access required information with ease and would be a good reference book for those wishing to obtain a broad picture of educational research. All of the chapters show a common structure and there is no over-emphasis on any one particular area. The chapters on special educational needs and on problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills are particularly good. The test-yourself questions at the end of each chapter are useful and some areas are covered in more detail and highlighted in boxed sections. The authors have avoided excess coverage of the educational uses of information technology (for example) and instead have got it just right in each such case: to ensure effective use is made of it, they offer a balance of coverage of research showing its advantages plus discussion highlighting it as an area for further study.

The only major criticism of the book is that the definition of *effective* in this context is not really set out at the beginning and, to this reader's mind at least, that makes it difficult to judge the success of any changes you make as a teacher as a result of reviewing your approach. However, the great strength of the book is bringing together a range of different ideas into one coherent view of our current understanding of learning and achievement in school, without dwelling on current political arguments.

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Rae, Leslie (2001) *Develop your Training Skills*
Kogan Page, London (& Stylus, Sterling VA)
ISBN 0-7494-3591-7 184 pp £16.99
kogan-page.co.uk info@kogan-page.co.uk

The book under review is a short power packed guide from a successful author and trainer, who has written a number of books in the field of training and development. Targeted at new

trainers and those who want to become trainers, it provides some basic tips on how to become successful in the field. Certainly being a successful trainer involves much more than reading (and/or reviewing) the book. One becomes a successful trainer only through good practice and experience. To that effect, the author discusses how to develop one's training skills. Written from the perspective of management consultants or human resource development managers in business and industry, the approaches discussed are equally applicable to new teachers in colleges and universities.

In the first two chapters, the author establishes the context of training, describes the qualities of good trainers, and considers their specific functions. The Townsend model of trainer types discussed enables you to introspect and identify what type of trainer you are. After that, Chapter 3 is all about planning, designing and delivering training sessions. Then, Chapter 4 describes how to make impact as a trainer. Strategies discussed here include the use of humour, quotations, questions, anecdotes, and so on. Tips for using non-verbal cues and better questioning strategies are suggested too.

To make a training/input session effective, to do no more than lecture (use "chalk and talk") is not sufficient. Chapter 5 therefore discusses the use of teaching resources in the input session. The aids discussed (with their relative advantages and disadvantages) include the flipchart, the whiteboard and the overhead projector (OHP). The use of the OHP is dealt with in detail. Other training aids that form a part of Chapter 6 are handouts, video, audio and computer assisted training materials.

Also, to make a training programme effective, even just talking with a range of aids would not be useful. For the learners/trainees, it would be too boring to listen only to lectures with or without use of media, as we all know. Chapters 7 and 8 therefore describe what other things a trainer can do in an input session. The techniques discussed in these two chapters include the buzz group, syndicate, demonstration, role play, case study, brainstorm, and action learning. The use of coaching and mentoring skills in the on the job training scenario forms the main part of

Chapter 9, which also describes the use of open learning and computer-based approaches to in-house training. Chapters 10 and 11 discuss the relationship between trainer and trainee. The communication process and communication barriers between trainer and trainee are covered in Chapter 10, whereas Chapter 11 describes how to cope with people, especially in training situations.

Overall this compact book is a valuable starting point for anyone interested in training. It is well illustrated with figures and diagrams. (However, on page 94, figure 6.1 is entirely missing and on page 74, figure 5.3 is wrongly labelled. Except for these two minor errors, the production quality is excellent. I am sure the book will be useful to its target audience, as it provides detailed step-by-step approaches and tips with dos and don'ts in training. If you want to be a trainer, just grab this book and practise the suggestions too!

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Seifert, Lucy (2001) *Pen and Paper Games for Training* Gower, Aldershot UK (& Burlington VT) ISBN 0-566-08299-3 175 pp £65
gowerpub.com info@gowerpub.com

This very useful collection of forty games and exercises is targeted, according to the author, to trainers who need stimulating, fun resources in workplace training contexts. And the publication lives up to its promise. Its layout is helpful, its content is accessible and easy to navigate, and its language is clear and straightforward.

Siefert, a trainer with long experience in designing workshops and training courses herself, has compiled this resource for ease of use and reference. Arranged alphabetically, each game is presented in an easy-to-follow format: aims and objectives, overview, application, trainer's role, participants' role(s), game techniques, resources, step-by-step implementation, suggested variations, notes and comments, and, in many cases, worked examples. Therefore, the trainer shopping for

something new to use in a workshop can decide quickly which game might be helpful in a specific context.

Ms Siefert also includes many handouts, which the trainer is encouraged to reproduce directly from the book (since each one is credited at the bottom of the page). Since the book has been published in A4 format, the reproduction for handouts is even easier. And games with intriguing titles like “Horses for Courses” and “Feedback Follies” encourage fun and participation in learning.

The games, while advertised as needing pen and paper resources, often incorporate flip charts and markers, and could easily be adapted to use cards and markers.

However, this book is not only useful for trainers, but also for the academic who needs participatory resources for developing learning groups. It is a “must” for all who believe that stimulating learning through participation is valuable.

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Stephenson, John ed (2001) *Teaching and Learning On-Line* Kogan Page, London (& Stylus, Sterling VA) ISBN 0-7494-3511-9 228 pp £19.99
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This text has an all encompassing title which might so easily hide a loose, rambling set of papers vaguely related to the burgeoning field of research and review of online learning. But thankfully, John Stephenson’s book is nothing like that. Each paper has been carefully selected to reflect a key dimension of this growing field and the editor has grouped related issues under clearly titled section headings. The papers are scrupulously referenced and academically sound, yet readable and engaging. Overall, then, the balanced mix of an editorial “hands off” approach and the careful selection of articles makes a strong and highly readable text for a wide range of readers—from someone with his/her first “toe

in the water” to those familiar with online technologies and pedagogies.

A major strength of the book is the way the editor has kept tight rein on its overall shape and made a deliberate attempt to balance theory with practice. The book therefore has a “toolbox” feel to it as well as a sense that all the writers really know their subject areas well.

I liked the way that Section 3 is given over to “Practitioners”. With five contributions this is by far the largest section. Readers are offered insights into the way different organisations have developed their own responses to the challenges and opportunities of the medium, to enhance, develop or even replace some of their traditional delivery methods. It makes for good reading—and the articles point out pitfalls to avoid as well as defining successful practices so help to ensure that ventures into the medium meet with some success, for learners as well as for teachers.

Earlier in the book there are two sections concerned with the development of a theory of online pedagogy. These sections are smaller, each containing two or three articles of fewer than twenty sides of reasonably large print each—but still each paper is punchy, clear and readable. There is little chance of readers new (or newish) to the field getting bogged down in jargon or rhetoric! Thus Part 1, From theory to practice—the academics, and Part 2, Researchers, offer clear and well written reviews of the key issues in online pedagogy. Each paper is prefaced by an editor’s paragraph (as are all in the book) which summarise key issues and/or highlights key points the author has set out to make.

John Stephenson has edited a book in which it is the writers who are clearly telling the story. However a criticism must be that the editor’s determination to take a back seat means that one of the key articles, which one suspects would be of real benefit and interest to readers new to the field, is tucked away at the end of the book. This paper, Learner managed learning—an emerging pedagogy for online learning, written by the editor and headed as an endpiece, is a brilliant synthesis of the main currents in pedagogical thought and practice. I felt that it helps explain John Stephenson’s

own thinking behind the overall shape and structure of the book—it has all the feel and content of a preface and ought to have been there, at the front rather than as an apparent editorial after-thought.

Teaching and Learning Online is a well structured, balanced text for a wide range of readers. The main threads of academic discussion are all there but they are couched in approachable language and this makes for a succinct text well peppered with clear examples of pedagogy in practice.

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Also received

Note that mention here does not preclude later full review.

Adelsberger, H H et al ed (2002) *Handbook on Information Technologies for Education and Training* Springer, London (& Heidelberg) ISBN 3-540-67803-4 688 pp £87/€124 boards
springer.de orders@springer.de

Part of the publisher's series of "International handbooks on information systems", this is a great fat book which does indeed concentrate on the technical side rather than on pedagogy. In other words, its concern is the design and implementation of hardware/software systems (including networks) for educational and training contexts, rather than how to use such systems for the most effective education and training. Its more than forty chapters each describe relevant research and practice and close with invaluable reference lists; the book itself has a fairly lengthy and detailed index—also invaluable. Apart from the introductory scene-setter by Betty Collis, those chapters come in five groups—technologies (ten chapters, from the web to digital video); the design life-cycle (nine, from—of course—design to evaluation and round again); "human actors" (seven, including relevant ethics and teacher training); subject areas (seven, including languages and humanities as well as the more obvious technical and

scientific areas); and settings (from the traditional school to various manifestations of electronic higher education). This book isn't hugely technical, by the way, and the names of a good number of contributors will be familiar to *BJET* readers.

Davies, Peter (1999) *70 Activities for Tutor Groups* Gower, Aldershot, UK (& Brookfield VT) ISBN 0-566-08000-1 214 pp
gowerpub.com info@gowerpub.com

Traditionally, surely, in Britain the "tutor group" is a teacher's personal form or class at secondary school level. Here, the author means a higher education tutorial group meeting to develop the tutor's subject area, though he emphasises that the ideas are valid for such groups at any level in any subject. Indeed, a good number would be appropriate for secondary school tutor groups (typically up to thirty in size and with no necessarily common pattern of study subject interests). Even so, most of the ideas are, at least to an extent, subject-specific—there being such things as writing editorials, role plays in historical and social contexts, and brain storming. Some of the ideas are based (one suspects) on popular television shows—so the accounts are not always clear enough for people who (like your reviewer) know nothing of such things!

Dreyfus, Hubert (2001) *On the Internet* Routledge, London (& New York) ISBN 0-415-22807-7 127 pp £7.99
tandf.co.uk enquiry@tandf.co.uk

Part of Routledge's "Thinking in action" series, this little philosophical essay is worth getting for your next holiday—very appropriate reading for lazy days on the beach, it will, even so, plant seeds in your mind that you'll want, post-holiday, to foster and surely disseminate. How does the Web affect the quality of our lives? That off the lives of non-surfers? How are Internet access styles affected by our cultures? What of morals, ethics, spirituality? What of "artificial" intelligence? If Lord Russell had lived to play with the Internet, he'd have produced a widely ranging, yet highly focussed, philosophical thought bank like this. Excellent!

Erikson, Rolf & Markuson, Carolyn (2001) *Designing a School Library Media Center for the Future* American Library Association, Chicago (& Eurospan) ISBN 0-8389-0790-3 109 pp £31.50 paper
eurospan.co.uk orders@eurospan.co.uk

In many countries—not just in the US, home of this book and of almost all its examples—school libraries were gradually fading away until people started putting computers into them twenty years ago; school resource centres had always been very rare until that same time. Now, for instance in British secondary schools, libraries typically offer as many as twenty—often more—on the academic network and thus ensure plenty of young visitors whenever they are open. Admittedly the stocks of books and non-print learning resources tend still to be small and are not much better used than they were, but the library resources centre has now widely taken up its role as a “centre” (a role rarely found for over a century, even in boarding schools). This book marks the next, growing phase of this development—the purpose design and building of much larger spaces for learning resources than ever before. The authors provide a good clear overview of all aspects of the design and fitting out of such spaces. However, despite the “future” in the book’s title, there is nothing new here (in particular little on open plan, the integration of these facilities within the school’s whole learning environment); the fairly few rather muddy monochrome photos do not add any 21st century excitement either.

Viennot, Laurence (2001) *Reasoning in Physics* Kluwer, Dordrecht NL (& London & Boston MA) ISBN 0-7923-7140-2 230 pp £57
wkap.nl orderdept@wkap.nl

Physics is a science perhaps peculiarly subject to educational misconception—and that’s on the part of the practitioners as well (therefore) as of the learners. Thus, there are academics who’ve devoted their lives to hunting conceptual errors in textbooks and exams, even at secondary school level, and those errors continue almost unabated (as the pages of the professional journals like *Physics education* show). There are resulting gulfs between what teachers and other resources put across, what learners understand, and what examiners expect—and the result of that in turn is a disturbingly high level of blind rote learning at all levels in the subject. Sub-titled “The part of common sense”, this book describes a lot of research into learners’ conceptual development (and misconceptual development!) as well as making suggestions as to how to focus on the right path. Mind you, “the part of common sense” is one of the problems—Aristotelian “physics” depended much on common sense, and Aristotelian physics is alive and well wherever the science is taught, matched with more modern misconceptual frameworks in the more modern topics (such as static and current electricity).