

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Educational Developments, Practices and Effectiveness: Global Perspectives and Contexts

Edited by Jennifer Lock, Petrea Redmond, and Patrick Alan Danaher
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In *Educational Developments, Practices and Effectiveness*, editors Jennifer Lock, Petrea Redmond, and Patrick Alan Danaher focus on exploring research and scholarship pertaining to developments in contemporary educational practice. They see these developments as having a positive semantic valence akin to terms such as change, improvement, reform, and transformation. Their goal in this book is “to apply sustained analysis and evaluation to the notion of academic development in today’s complex and socially, politically and culturally charged educational sectors” (p. 10). They claim that the chapters of this book offer distinctive, powerful ideas for educational development and explore different ways to enhance the quality of teaching, therefore improving the quality of learning.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the book in which the editors concentrate on defining educational development. They refer to Amundsen and Wilson (2012), who developed clusters of techniques for implementing educational development in different contexts, focusing namely on skills, methods, reflection, institutional plans, disciplinary pedagogical knowledge, and teaching and learning questions of interest to faculty. But Amundsen and Wilson’s main contribution consists of a table presenting and paralleling five conceptual

frameworks for analyzing and evaluating educational developments and practices. The contents of these frameworks seem to be inspired in large measure by the six clusters just mentioned. They concede from the start that educational developments are complex, multifaceted phenomena that elude easy analysis and resist automatic application in other contexts.

“Managing Developments in Education: Social-Business-Learning as Opportunity and Challenge for Corporate Learning” is written by Sabine Seufert and Christoph Meier. This chapter’s authors describe a new and promising approach to corporate learning and development called “social-business-learning.” Pointing out that 70% to 80% of the knowledge needed to perform is acquired in the course of work, Seufert and Meier insist on the importance of informal learning in the workplace and argue that social learning can help disseminate knowledge within and across business units and even across organizational boundaries; hence the importance of social media infrastructures for sharing, collaborating, and learning. The last part of the chapter demonstrates how it is possible to capitalize on social media to improve learning and development processes, and how to manage the implementation of a social-business-learning system.

In “Thinking Collaboratively in Educational Environments: Shared Metacognition and Co-Regulation in Communities of Inquiry,” authors Randy Garrison and Zehra Akyol invite organizational leaders and members to share their reflections on “the crucial influence that intellectual engagement with a stimulating environment has on thinking and meaningful learning” (p. 39). Garrison and Zehra note that there is an increasing emphasis on collaborative learning in higher education and that research points to the capacity of the community-of-inquiry framework to create a collaboratively constructivist learning environment in which students can reach deep and meaningful learning experiences. They discuss the value of metacognition for collaborative learning and, even more interesting, share a questionnaire to measure it. Their framework for a community of inquiry sheds an interesting light on the variables influencing the success of this pedagogical method. A brief look at “action learning” could have been pertinent, as this approach is well known in educational training programs.

“The Changing Nature of Educational Support for Students with Disabilities” is a significant report on research aimed at evaluating the impact of an improved support program set up for students with disabilities at an Australian regional university. It is written by Shalene Werth and Shaunaugh Brady. This program went beyond the traditional

advocacy role of disability services and resources to include personal coaching or mentoring in order to ensure that students are well prepared for the workplace. It provides them with training and support to develop skills in resilience and ways to manage the perceptions of others regarding their disabilities. The data collected from students who benefited from the new program suggest that they felt better equipped to face the marketplace. It seems reasonable to conclude that such a program could be adapted to suit students with disabilities in vocational and high schools and even at the elementary level.

Chapter 5, written by Lindy Abawi, is probably the most systemic and adaptable chapter of the book in the sense that it can be beneficial to any type of organization or administrative unit. Entitled “A Vision and Language for Schoolwide Pedagogical Improvement,” this chapter is fundamentally about organizational development, professional team building, cultural change, and effectiveness strategies. Within the context of an Australian project aimed at enhancing achievement in schools, the author reports on a three-school case study using a refractive, phenomenological research process to evaluate the extent to which pedagogical language is capable of facilitating a change in practices at the collective and individual levels, schoolwide and in classrooms. We learn the process by which a majority of the schools’ members have moved towards a common vision of their school’s mission, a shared pedagogical approach to teaching, and a regulatory and accountable system.

“Evaluation as an Educational Development to Improve Practice: Teacher ICT Knowledge, Skills and Integration” by Karen Trimmer and “Conceptualising, Implementing and Evaluating the Use of Digital Technologies to Enhance Mathematical Understanding: Reflections on an Innovation-Development Cycle” by Linda Galligan and her colleagues both focus on the integration of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the classroom. A conceptual framework identifying nine factors related to the school and the teacher and the application and use of these technologies by teachers was developed to measure teachers’ ICT competence. The results of the evaluation show that teachers’ use of ICTs, their attitudes and motivation, and the school’s capacities are the most important factors influencing teacher competence. The study also sought to examine the extent to which these skills and knowledge were applied by teachers within teaching and learning programs in the classroom. In Chapter 8, Linda Galligan et al. “chronicled the journey of five mathematics/statistics educators as they embarked on a voyage of discovery that explored the use of a range of new tablet technologies and their impact on

teaching and learning” (p.153). Their investigation was divided into three distinct, very well described phases: exploration, consolidation, and new directions. Each one forms part of the innovation-development cycle. The results of this research provide evidence that the technologies investigated improved support and engagement, fostered understanding, and enhanced multidirectional communication.

In “Exploring Teaching Developments: Influencing Sustainable Engineering Practice,” David Thorpe draws on the fact that sustainable practice is increasingly significant for the engineering profession and supported by engineering professional organizations to explore this concept, discusses sustainability requirements, and reviews approaches currently used for teaching the implications of sustainable practice to engineering students in tertiary institutions. Thorpe proposes a transdisciplinary systems approach to developing sustainability skills and presents a conceptual framework, describing a “continuous improvement loop [focused on] progressive development of students” (p. 126) during their four-year study program. He concludes that this program will not necessarily improve sustainability in engineering projects in a short period of time, but that developing sustainability consciousness among graduate students should have an impact in the long run.

The last chapter, “Mass Media—Entertainer or Educator of Children? Raising This Issue and Proposing Productive Solutions,” was written by Jennifer Donovan. After summarizing the literature concerning the influence of entertainment mass media on knowledge and beliefs, she reports that no science-related conceptual understanding was quoted in two meta-analyses of 50 years of television, and that researchers are calling for exploratory research that would provide evidence that mass media could result in informal learning. Her study responds to this call and sheds some light on the issue. She found that primary school children are being exposed to media sources about genetics and that they are aware of learning specific knowledge and concepts on the subject, but that not all of them know a lot about genetics. Following her examination of the results, she recommends encouraging teachers to engage in discussions with children about television programs and other mass media that they regularly watch in order to help and guide them toward acquiring appropriate science knowledge from what they have seen. She calls for campaigning to modify entertainment television programs to include scientific information that is “accurate and well-rounded,” but acknowledges that these recommendations will take time to be adopted widely.

The final remarks are aimed at educational practitioners who are not aware of the literature published during the last decade in the field of educational development. While its conceptual and structural logic may not be evident from a quick glance at the table of contents, this book is about diverse, specialized developments conducted in very different types of contexts. In reading it, they will discover that these developmental and cultural changes often share elements, or “ingredients,” in common that, firstly, can be adapted to a wide range of organizational contexts and, secondly, address a large number of educational needs. In this perspective, it seems important to stress that practitioners need to look at this sampling and other educational developments as a pool of promising and inspiring drivers of improvement that can be “recrafted” to fit their own particular educational and organizational needs. They have to envisage educational development in the manner the editors suggest, as referring to “the processes of conceptualising, initiating, implementing and evaluating educational change” at varying “levels of complexity” and “centred on the process of learning” (p. 2). It is a perspective that should be familiar to them.

References

- Amundsen, C., & Wilson, M. (2012). Are we asking the right question ? A conceptual review of the educational development literature in higher education. *Review of Educational Research*, 82(1), 90–126.