

Reviews

Dai, David Yun ed (2012) *Design research on learning and thinking in educational settings* Routledge (New York & London) ISBN 978-0-415-88051-0 299 pp £32.99

<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415880510/>

Summary

This rich and very interesting book, addressed to professionals and graduate students interested in educational innovation, investigates the creation of optimal learning conditions and how these can support personal and context resources. This is to help learners achieve not only content knowledge and competence but also a favourable disposition to learn and to make use of higher-order thinking skills. If the content of this book is likely to be relevant to your research and development, I recommend that you borrow a copy to study.

Giuliana Dettori

Design research provides a new way of approaching research on learning; it turns attention to the creation of optimal learning conditions and investigates how these can support personal and context resources—first to improve learning, but also to develop a positive disposition to learn and make use of higher-order thinking skills. It is involved with the deliberate arrangement of context support, as well as of learner's interaction with tasks and peers. Its basic idea is that learning outcomes are shaped by the way learning is organised: agency, structure and resources work together to produce learning and promote intellectual growth. The key questions tackled in this field concern how to identify and create the most favourable conditions for effective learning and development, thus preparing learners to cope with challenges such as deeply understanding concepts, theories and principles; making causal reasoning; solving complex problems; and exercising critical and creative thinking. This is a very relevant topic for both professionals and graduate students interested in educational innovation—to whom this book is addressed—as well as for research methodologists. Unfortunately, it is too dense and theoretical for educational practitioners to gain much from.

Design research on learning and thinking in educational settings analyses how a solution to a learning

problem can be designed, implemented, tested, and finally improved and optimised from the formative point of view—the essence of educational technology, of course. Its ten chapters come in two parts: “Issues, theories and methods”, whose concern is broad conceptual and technical issues related to developing intellectual potential; and “Models, tools and pragmatics”, which looks at specific experiences on the design of principles, models and prototypes. The contents include:

- a historical perspective on learning and intelligence;
- the identification of design needs to fulfil relevant educational goals;
- the analysis of how to structure learning environments optimally to develop the ability to act and think intelligently;
- pedagogical models for promoting creative and critical thinking across subjects;
- approaches to investigating the design of interventions, as well as to assessing learning gains—from the point of view of the development of dispositions and thinking skills as well as of content acquisition.

Common questions and themes are addressed throughout the book and constitute a useful linkage between the chapters. In particular here we have an emphasis on the interaction of practice, theory, and research; as well as concern with how learning and thinking about important matters can be scaffolded and pedagogically supported; how distinct norms can be created and maintained to boost and enhance learning and thinking; how we can design assessment to trace and monitor learners' progress; and how to develop information technological tools to assist all these.

The picture that comes from this reading emphasises that learning outcomes are not isolated individual phenomena, but growth trajectories within a dynamic context. High level intellectual performance is distributed among collaborating individuals as well as the environment in which the learning activity takes place, the tasks assigned, and the tools applied. Learning is characterised as perspectival, instrumental and reflective. These three aspects support each other and foster a new organisation of intellectual functioning. This characterisation means that learners increasingly gain insightful perspective on the object of study by becoming able to

recognise, appreciate and value it. They acquire disciplinary content—and learn to use it to achieve particular outcomes; they learn to solve problems—and become aware why to engage in an activity, for what purpose it is useful, and how to find and apply the tools and resources to achieve their goals. Reflection is crucial to transform individual curiosity into meaningful and sound inquiry. Being increasingly able to make adaptive changes through thoughtfully designed experiences creates the possibility for learners to become increasingly more “intelligent” through learning.

This book is very rich, dense and conceptual; its reading, however, is not always easy, and is often further slowed down by too much repetition within and between chapters. Nevertheless I strongly suggest its reading by anyone who works on the development and innovation of educational technology, because it is altogether very interesting and full of stimulating ideas and useful insights. And we look forward to a version accessible by and applicable to course designers, educational managers, and teachers.

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Latchem, Colin (2012) *Quality assurance toolkit for open and distance non-formal education* Commonwealth of learning (Vancouver) ISBN 978-1-894975-50-6 98 pp CDN\$12 (or free download) <http://www.col.org/resources/publications/Pages/detail.aspx?PID=403>

Summary

Colin Latchem's quality assurance toolkit for non-formal education (NFE) will serve a variety of readers well. It demonstrates clearly how technology of any generation can be used to improve outcomes for peoples who are disadvantaged, remotely located or of low status. Its presentation of a pragmatic quality assurance framework moves social justice agendas forward. If the content of this book is likely to be relevant to you, I recommend that you arrange to borrow a copy for a while.

Robyn Smyth

Colin Latchem's short discussion about quality assurance in non-formal education (NFE) is a well researched and well presented work that many educators will find useful. The ideas, case studies and definitional detail provide a rich knowledge base

from which to consider quality assurance in a range of settings. Latchem's work will become a building block for much future activity. Indeed, it seems likely to become the basis for more effective standards—and these should benefit the NFE sector and therefore the future impact of social and economic equality and progress, especially in the “third world”.

In particular, the case studies of NFE using everything from paper to eTuktuks, and from radio to tablet mobile devices—and more—show well how creative use of many generations of technology can support relevant and useful public and targeted NFE in the poorest and / or most isolated parts of the world. To accept that the use of an outcomes- or results-based quality framework could improve the impact of such activities will be a huge step forward. This is especially so since the framework presented by Professor Latchem is simple to use, provides useful evaluation data, and could scaffold project applications and reporting. This structuring will enable government and non-government funding agencies to

- target funding calls in ways which suit needs derived from stakeholder input;
- monitor and evaluate outcomes against key performance indicators or, preferably, critical success factors;
- try to ensure that the outcomes benefit the recipients.

This short but critical work will interest scholars of learning and teaching and of development studies, learning technologists, funding authorities, and the general reader. It provides clear context for the issues. In particular, we should all recognise that there are too many projects whose achievement of outcomes cannot always be well assured, particularly in relation to sustainable, viable impact. Also, the *Quality assurance toolkit for open and distance non-formal education* sets out to clarify the landscape with well researched and well articulated definitions; it demonstrates positive and negative issues through detailed case studies; and then it develops a solution ... that quality framework.

The theme throughout is that technology can be used in many and varied ways with amazing creativity; this shows how well technology can serve NFE agendas regardless of apparent local limitations. I found the case studies stimulating and interesting as well as inspiring.

The quality framework is intended as a simple but useful metric to assess how well inputs, outcomes and impact are achieved. Inputs alone are insufficient indicators since NFE has widely differing contexts and is often focused on a project, an issue or a process. The usefulness of the framework comes

from the focus on outcomes and through that on impact. Oh, and it destroys the myths about evaluation's being too hard and too complex, unnecessary and inflexible.

Associate professor Robyn Smyth (received April 2013)

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Lissitz Robert W & Hong Jiao ed (2012) *Computers and their impact on state assessments* IAP (Charlotte, NC) ISBN 978-1-61735-725-1 326 pp \$45.99
<http://www.infoagepub.com/products/Computers-and-Their-Impact-on-State-Assessments>

Summary

This long awaited volume on computer based tests covers many of the aspects that general practitioners in education involved in the many different forms of state assessments have been missing. Although based on practice in the US, its application is universal in these times of educational accountability. Undoubtedly researchers in testing will find it full of well organised ideas that apply to their own work. If this book is likely to be relevant to your work, I recommend that you buy a copy for your own use.

Jesus Garcia Laborda

The US—like many countries in the world—is in a time of standardised educational assessment. Schools and local boards of education have been forced to reinforce policies that look at testing for educational achievement as the main way to prove their excellence. As a result, programmes of extensive testing for the individual and school performance analysis have become very common. Currently, after some years of “No child left behind”, the US’s “Race to the top” programme has used computer based testing to increase the potential of tests for quantitative assessments and to justify the government distribution of funds. Based on these premises, this book includes the most relevant presentations of the “Computers and their impact on state assessments” conference held at the University of Maryland in October 2010. (Yes—it is rather a gap between conference and this published report.)

The book approaches different aspects of testing, from drawing up technical specifications to making policies to promote computers for assessment. Additionally, there are features that make it a useful volume of general assessment interest—such as the description of different types of testing procedures

(like lineal or adaptive or linear); their benefits and drawbacks; even algorithms for adaptive testing; and the design of the computer interfaces.

Computers and their impact on state assessments has three main parts. The first part describes how computer-based testing is currently implemented; the second looks at associated technical and psychometric issues; and the concern of the third one is the future of computer-based testing.

The first part serves to provide the framework and up-to-date information on the state of the field across the USA (well, up-to-date in 2010 when the book was *really* written). These chapters are so well written and the information is so fine that they are perfectly applicable world-wide; also, they provide details that can certainly help those who approach computer-based testing for the first time to understand the process. For those who are already happy with the field, this part provides answers on how others are doing their tests using computers.

One minor criticism is that the reader will find no information on “ubiquitous testing” or on using cellphones / mobile phones; both are also currently being explored in the US and elsewhere for these exams. However, perhaps not everyone is interested in going beyond what is actually being done now!

In this first part of *Computers and their impact on state assessments*, Chapters 4 (on how contracting companies operate) and 5 (on problem areas around implementation) attracted my special interest. The former?—because it provides precise information on how computer-based testing consortia operate. Many in computer-based testing will never have to create—or even find out how to design and deliver—the tests—but all need to know how to organise them and what to expect from providers. In this sense, Chapter 4 gives fine information on both aspects. Chapter 5 deals with technical matters such as computer based architecture, current systems used by international companies, management and creation of item repositories, and security. Probably little is novel, but the chapter is certainly very clear and accessible even to a novice reader, and is a “must” here.

The second part of the book is of no less interest. Readers will surely appreciate Chapter 6, whose author deals with the creation of new types of test item. Since for many years computer-based testing did little but reproduce pen-and-paper tests, this chapter provides valuable information on how new item types are currently taking over. Aspects such as simulation, serious gaming, and working through virtual tasks are now quite common. I believe that such styles go beyond the current cognitivist

approach to testing and have implications for other interactional types of assessment based on the development of the zone of proximal development. In this part of the book, you will probably not want to miss thinking about the taxonomy of new items—this may be extremely important not only for assessment but for better course organisation.

More technical are the other chapters here on automated scoring; the theory of adaptive testing; the application to computer-based assessment of diagnostic modelling; and the commercial approach of the “smarter testing” consortia. However, American teachers may find in these chapters information to facilitate their understanding of their own state assessments.

Last, Part 3 deals with changes in testing frameworks; the changes brought by computer-based testing; new ways of looking at knowledge delivery in the classroom; and new test constructs.

Overall, *Computers and their impact on state assessments* has much to interest all teachers, at least at secondary levels (from about Grade 7) and higher, as well as assessment researchers. Probably its best feature is its capacity to engage and to inform in a very accessible way.

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McGreal, Rory et al ed (2013) *Open educational resources: Innovation, research and practice* Commonwealth of learning (Vancouver) ISBN 978-1-894975-62-9 239 pp CDN\$12 (free pdf or e-book) <http://www.col.org/resources/publications/Pages/detail.aspx?PID=446>

Summary

A timely and wide ranging look at the developing world of Open Educational Resources (OER), with contributions that will be valuable for academics, developers and anyone wishing to gain an informed overview of the field. If you believe the content of this book may well be relevant to you, I suggest that you borrow a copy to study.

Pete Cannell

This is a timely collection of articles on Open Educational Resources (OER), available for free download from the Commonwealth of Learning website. While the media and much of the academic world has focused attention on Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), the book’s authors, writing from a range of

perspectives, make it clear that MOOCs form just one part of a much more diverse and creative landscape. In the preface Asha Kanwar, President of the Commonwealth of Learning notes the pace of development since the UNESCO declaration on OER in June 2012 and observes that “... the key question is no longer about the ‘how’ of OER development. It is more about realising the value to be derived from OER.”

The book is aimed at researchers, teachers and practitioners, and the range and content of the contributions means that its value extends well beyond those who have a technical interest in the subject. It combines informed reflection with examples and case studies, and in this respect it would make a good starting point for anyone wishing to gain an insight into current developments and debates.

There are sixteen chapters divided equally into four sections; these cover “OER in academia”, “OER in practice”, “Diffusing OER” and “Producing, sharing and using OER”. The authors come from ten countries spread across four continents.

An important feature of OER is their potential to develop social learning through communities of learners. Examples discussed in the text include the UK Open University’s OpenLearn, The African Virtual University, and the ways in which learners on MOOCs come together in social spaces—which may be part of the learning environment or created by the learners themselves using social media and sometimes face to face communities. There is also a welcome discussion that distinguishes between the better known x-MOOCs and explicitly designed social connectivist c-MOOCs.

One of the editors, Rory McGreal, argues that a characteristic of OER is that they are technologically neutral since they can be re-formatted and re-fitted for use on different platforms. Perhaps more controversially, he considers that OER are also pedagogically neutral in as much as different theoretical / pedagogical perspectives can be embedded in learning objects while we construct them. This seems to be a rather restricted view of neutrality. Indeed, it could be argued that the range of examples covered in the book exemplify the ways in which OER are developed in the context of cultures, practices and a history in which different choices are made.

For those who are new to the development of open licensing, the “OER in practice” section includes an excellent chapter called “Realising the Open in open educational resources”; this includes clear explanations of the different options that are in use and sets their development in historical context. There is also an international and equity perspective with discussion on the challenges of creating and using OER in

developing countries and case studies of the use of OER in widening participation projects.

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Pedler, Mike ed (2011) *Action learning in practice*
 Gower (Farnham UK, & Ashgate, Burlington VT)
 ISBN 978-1-4094-1841-2 449 pp £85
[http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637](http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&calcTitle=1&title_id=10122&edition_id=10437)
 &calcTitle=1&title_id=10122&edition_id=10437

Summary

This is a first-class source for those interested in action learning—this being a long established self-directed process for tackling business and work problems in learning sets with peers and colleagues. The book opens with highly readable seminal texts, and progresses from such introductory material to different approaches, examples, and questioning of theorising. A powerful resource whatever the reader's starting point. If this book's content may well be relevant to your work, I suggest you buy your own copy.

John Cowan

This is not so much a book as a graduated library of mini-texts about action learning. Confronting this profusion of chapters, the editor and publishers have done an excellent job in preventing profusion from becoming confusion for the reader. The contents are arranged in four parts of growing depth and complexity. The format, font style, use of short sections and clear, useful and attractive figures all combine to render the result a readable, coherent, integrated and motivating text. In particular, the editor's short commentary sections are helpful and welcome, rather than simply giving a bland summary of contents as so many editors tend to do.

The editor's task has been more than usually challenging. That's because all concerned are clear that action learning—which its originator Reg Revans so named only late in his career, and which he forcefully declined to define—is open to meaning different things to different people. It has thus developed in many legitimate forms and a richly diverse range of approaches—but all unite in endorsing Revans's claim that "there can be no learning without action, and no (sober or deliberate) action without learning."

All those forms and approaches emphasise the central role of the "set" (the group of learners concerned). So the *second* part in this carefully struc-

tured text covers "Varieties", and clearly presents the main options. It opens with an overview of the classical self-managed action learning—which avoids external facilitation and continues to respect all Revans's injunctions. And it progresses to the other extreme—this being "critical action learning", a form that verges on a radical departure from its Revanesque predecessors by featuring a more active facilitation role plus the linking of questioning insight to complex emotional aspects. Between these extremes come, first, "action reflection learning" in which reflection has a key role, and which perhaps resonates to the special if not unique Scandinavian values and approach to management and leadership. Then there is an uncharacteristically heavy presentation of "business-driven action learning" with its Franco-American shift in emphasis from learning to action. After that, inevitably, comes the still under-exploited "virtual action learning"; this explores the use of collaborative communication technologies in various ways. This second part of the book closes with a useful analytical summary of the main options by O'Neill and Marsick.

The "Varieties" part is usefully preceded by a courageous first part on "Origins". This reprints several long-standing pieces of seminal writing in the field, lone by one, with virtually no editing or augmenting, and showing no need for attention to maintain their readability, relevance and effectiveness. A noteworthy feature of Revans's evergreen writing is how, as an obviously committed Christian, he makes use, powerfully and effectively (at least for Christian readers), of relevant and telling Biblical quotations. He is followed later in this by Casey, whose chapter on "Set advising" has a firm basis in Benedictine and Jesuit traditions of education. The book's first part closes with a splendid "Action manual" by Pearce, which brings it all together with crisp, feasible, meaty advice about how to go about action learning; every page of this is full of gems of proven practice.

The third part offers an assortment of case studies grouped under "Applications". Five of these deal with situations and approaches concerned to develop leadership and to bring about a shift to new thinking about organising and leading. For people with such difficult higher level interpersonal aims in mind, there is much of value here whereon they can reflect, and find advice. Then follow two chapters about facilitating learning. The first, by Brockbank and McGill, introduces the notion of affective needs within learning sets. You might be forgiven for gaining the impression that this chapter aims covertly to promote the texts and workshop activities of these two writers. It is so strangely at variance with Revans's principle that sets should function without externality, and with the cautiously Jesuitical establishment of an atmosphere of trust and love advo-

cated by Casey in the first part of the book. The short chapter which follows supportively draws interesting parallels between the pro-active development of leaders in action learning sets and the purposeful development of facilitators, both of which one presumes Revans would question. The editor then returns to the main theme with examples dealing with the way action learning builds on social as well as human capital. The closing chapter in this part reassuringly details the spread of action learning around the world, without providing much detail of the range of activity which that entails.

And so to the demanding final part, to which no brief review can do justice, for it sets out to do what Revans steadfastly ignored—to deal with the under-theorising of action learning. The contributions cover a search for a philosophical pragmatism within action learning; the role of critical realism and new modernism in action learning; links between philosophy originating from practical knowing and action learning methodology; social perspectives and relationships between action learning and systems change dynamics; the action learning epistemology; a typology of actions related to a more integrated model of action proposed by Vygotsky; the risk that action learning can lead to inactivity and the darker side of critical reflection in generating uncertainty and conflict; and the relationship of action learning to other learning theories. There's much food for thought, here, in sharply questioning writings—at least some of which I hope Revans would commend.

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Rose, Ellen (2013) *On reflection* Canadian Scholars' Press (Toronto) ISBN 978-1-551-30518-9 124 pp \$29.95
www.cspi.org/books/reflection

Summary

Ellen Rose sets out to initiate deep thinking about what reflection is and should be. She achieves that in an elegantly written, highly readable and thought-provoking treasure-trove of scholarly writing. This should be essential reading for those who value reflection and reflective activity. Readers will rejoice in having their thinking on the subject deepened by this exceptional thinker. If you are intrigued by the content of this book, I recommend you purchase a copy for your own use.

John Cowan

The sub-title of this essay is “An essay on technology, education, and the status of thought in the 21st century”, which says much more than the title.... I picked it up feeling I know all about thinking on, and practising, reflection. I also reassured myself that I had long accepted the writer's firm advocacy of slowness and thoughtfulness as attributes of the commendably reflective mind.

And then I began to read.

I have to confess that Ellen Rose's superb text immediately seduced me to go at a gallop through the succession of wonderful chapters, all intriguing me with their well-carved phrases and sentences and delightfully chosen words. So much for slowness and thoughtfulness! For I was thrilled by the freshness and rich scholarship of Rose's thinking, which bombarded me with one new or deeper nuance or issue after another. I felt urged on to encounter the next nuggets of wisdom, my mind full of mental notes about points to which I promised myself I would return, on a slow and thoughtful second or third reading. I found myself decisively enlisted as an enthusiastic disciple of this wise, scholarly, erudite writer. Let me share that enthusiasm with you!

In a field where “reflection” has so many diverse meanings for those who use the term, Rose points me and other readers perceptively towards the striking yet largely unremarked transformation from the seminal writings of Dewey and Schön. Firmly she immediately sets out to reclaim the concept of reflection as deep, sustained thought, as opposed to the instrumental, positivist model advanced by Dewey, which was in effect a systematised scheme for purposeful analysis leading into problem solving. She notes that, although Schön rejected this tidy approach to reflection, placing considerable stress on intuitive reactions in the midst of the action, both he and Dewey nevertheless wrote of systematic problem-solving reflections which led into actions. She challengingly rejects reflection-in-action as an oxymoron, since true reflection, which requires (in her view) solitude and slowness, cannot take place instantaneously. Equally and scathingly she disposes of reflection-on-action as mere review or assessment, a view which many reflective practitioners—myself included—may dispute. In their place she posits reflection-then-action, in which reflection precedes and informs action. Consequently she seems minded that Kolb's oft-disregarded “active experimentation” is to have a second life. As a pragmatist, I concurred with this stress on action, only to be stirred from that complacency by her examination of the rise of the reflective mind. In what she modestly calls a “glimpse into the historical co-development of written language, typography

and the reflective intellect”, Rose conveys her readers into an enthralling and meaningfully relevant historical world. She discovers explanations, points out issues, and identifies possibilities which were fresh to me. And she presents them in a way which made me intrigued and humble, but never embarrassed that these topics had hitherto been untouched ground for me.

Next, she bewails the phenomenon of a-literacy, or devaluation of and retreat from words, with consequent promotion of superficial thinking. The familiar circular relationship between reading and writing, she argues, leads to un-reflective reading of today’s exchanges in writing or txtng. She presents a rigorous and troubling consideration of the impact of available communication technologies on reflection, leading most of us to live in a state of “continuous partial attention”, with social life being increasingly transferred online. She ascribes the decline of reflection to thinking which never stops to collect itself, to the absence of time to think, and to the developing habit of flitting superficially from one topic to another. She tellingly likens the decline of reflective thinking (due to the absence of time to stop and think) to Socrates’s valid warning of the decline of memory in his day (due to the advent of the written word).

The challenge of technology for teachers is presented as a need to find ways to create learning experiences which do not hyper-stimulate learners as at present, but which minimise distractions and help learners to find their focus. Her troubling examples here will convince readers that she has current awareness of the engulfing competition from laptops, Blackberrys, social networking, and the bullet point culture of the ubiquitous *PowerPoint*. Before closing, she engages with the danger that education nowadays will provide students with qualifications and job skills ... and little else.

This essay on technology education and the status of thought in the 21st century is a gem. If you are interested in reflection—or even technology education—buy it, read it, read it again and again, seek out its many messages ... and reflect deeply upon them.

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Thompson, Phillip M (2012) *Returning to reality*
 Lutterworth (Cambridge) ISBN 978-0-7188-9295-1
 130 pp £15 (paper and e-book)
[http://www.lutterworth.com/product_info.php/
 products_id/1842](http://www.lutterworth.com/product_info.php/products_id/1842)

Summary

This book offers a broad-brush critique of the role of technology in modern life as seen through the spiritual lens of Thomas Merton’s writing. The author, a theologian, argues that we must carefully balance the benefits of modern technology with its perils if we are to retain our humanity, as well as any vestige of the contemplative life. His general focus and generalising style mean that there is little here that *specifically* relates to, or would interest those in, educational technology. Target readers include theologians, philosophers and anyone interested.

Sara Hammer

In *Returning to reality* (sub-titled “Thomas Merton’s wisdom for a technological age”), Thompson offers a wide ranging critique of modern technology based on the work of Thomas Merton, Trappist monk and writer. He argues that our fixation with the technology and the wants it can gratify has transformed modern individuals into disconnected, distracted and superficial beings. Merton’s reflections about the “triumph of technology in the modern world” are used as fuel for Thompson’s critique, and as a recipe for balancing the attractions of technological modernity with the need to nurture our own humanity.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a synthesis of Merton’s “contemplative critique of technology”. Merton argued that mechanical progress gives only the illusion of progress because, while it satisfies material wants, it also focuses our attention outwards and alienates us from our own inner selves. Here Merton’s work provides the basis for Thompson’s own critique of our use of technology, which reflects a modern life that pursues external means for external ends, and activity for activity’s sake. He associates, and arguably conflates, technology with war, consumerism, and capitalism.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on our current use of technology in the communications and biotechnological domains, respectively. Thompson describes our modern world as one in which we are inundated by a “communications tsunami” brought about by our use of technological gadgets and social media. In Chapter 4 he argues that our search for perfection and control over our environment may result in the creation of another species that Thompson calls “transhumans”. Over the course of both chapters, Thompson contrasts our “Promethean” desire for control over our environment as the motivating force for developing technologies, with our isolated, distracted docility as consumers of technology.

The final two chapters conclude that, while it is impractical to distance ourselves completely from it,

we should ensure that technology serves us rather than our being subservient to it. Thompson urges us to restore our “sense of spiritual vitality” by rationing our use of technology so as to provide space for deep reflection and an inner life.

This book uses the work of Merton to make a worthwhile point about the potential pitfalls of technology use. However, Thompson’s argument is repetitive in places and relies heavily on generalities: an approach that oversimplifies the issue of technology use and its effects on the modern world.

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Wildflower, Leni (2013) *The hidden history of coaching* Open University Press (McGraw-Hill Maidenhead UK & New York) ISBN 978-0-3352-4540-6 165 pp £22.99
<http://mcgraw-hill.co.uk/html/0335245404.html>

Summary

In a scholarly yet readable style, the writer presents a history which goes beyond the foundations of coaching. However, she chooses not to present the history chronologically, but rather by themes with clear and meaningful links within the text. Anyone with a keen interest and involvement in facilitation, mentoring or counselling will find this a rich and valuable source book. If you are such a person, I recommend you buy a copy of this book for your own use.

John Cowan

This is unquestionably the most readable, useful, informative, scholarly text I have yet encountered in the field I have been accustomed to call facilitation and counselling, but will henceforward call coaching. In a mere 147 pages, Leni Wildflower summarises, correlates and offers critiques on the many, varied—and not always compatible—strands which have led to current coaching practice and human development activities. She manages to do this while at the same time giving us insights into the backgrounds and personalities of the various key figures in our coaching history, and so succinctly brings them and their own significant personal histories to life for us. She does all of this, and more, very effectively—by presenting her history by themes and inter-related schools of thought and personalities, rather than chronologically. She even makes mentions of world events of the periods of which she

writes, to benchmark our grasp of their timing. The text is nevertheless intense in its coverage of the writer’s main subject matter, livened by skilful use of apt quotations, with chapter introductions from other practitioners and useful and practical chapter summaries, pointing to the lessons to be taken from each chunk of our history for our current practice.

And if that makes it sound as if this text is a jumbled assortment, please put out that idea from your mind. This is a professionally assembled text, which sets out to provide a scholarly summary of the basis of coaching—and does so, quite splendidly in a style which held my attention and enthusiasm throughout. I had but one reservation. I have no problems with clients, subjects or learners all being referred to by female pronouns. But this was not always consistently followed by the writer and her co-contributors, some exceptions almost leaving the (wrong) impression that the male pronoun was reserved for difficult cases! Maybe in the second edition, the female pronoun should be used throughout.

Beginning from the self-help gurus, she moves on to the creative turmoil which centred on the Esalen Institute, and thence to Rogers, Jung, Ram Dass and others who introduced spiritual and mystical contributions to the developing schools of thought. From there it is a logical step to move to neuro-linguistic programming. Then a short step backwards or across to sports psychology or coaching, before doubling back again to Freud and Jung, and the relationships of their thinking and practice to what has already been introduced. Next she covers physical aspects of human development, and the role of feelings, the “Gestalt” search for wholeness; then back again in time to fuller consideration of Rogers and Maslow. Then back yet again to Watson and Skinner for cognitive behaviour therapy leading into Berne and transactional analysis. Finally, there’s a rich section on self and others. This engages with the group experience, the struggle to find identity in the workplace, and the role of oft-maligned psychometric tools in coaching and training.

I am conscious that in this brief review I have not included mention of the many eminent theorists to whose work and thinking this text does full justice, however. I must just leave you to buy the text (borrowing won’t let you make full use of it), and encounter the giants of history for yourselves, with Leni as an able, and charming, guide.

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