

## Book Review

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### Rethinking learning for a digital age: how learners are shaping their experiences

Rhona Sharpe, Helen Beetham and Sara de Freitas

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Reviewer: David Walker, Senior Learning Technologist, University of Dundee

There are voices in my head - learner voices. Their messages resonate within me - some loud, some more subtle, but all are real, all have meaning and all are worthy of attention. Learners - by definition - have much to learn, but there is much to be learned from learners themselves. *Rethinking Learning for a Digital Age* (the follow-up to the immensely valuable *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age*) gives us an insight into learners' experience of technology and the role it plays in their lives and in particular their education. The fifteen chapters that make up the book are laden with research that is brought to life through the rich words of learners. These are not simply observations by researchers on the perceived adeptness or otherwise of students at using technology and the effect it has on their learning; rather they are rigorous analyses of the lived experiences of real students. These go a long way towards debunking the myths around learners' facility in relation to using technology in different context; the learning strategies they employ; and their perceptions and awareness of self and identity in the digital environment.

The book includes contributions from some of the leading researchers in the field of technology enhanced learning and is usefully organised into three parts. Part I includes chapters on the theme of *New Contexts for Learning* with an exploration of virtual worlds, serious games and social networking. Consideration is given to whether technology is driving new pedagogies, and whether the opportunities afforded by ubiquitous access to learning are threatening quality and standards. Common assumptions made about learners' use of social networking are challenged, as is the question of whether or not they desire greater adoption of Web 2.0 technologies in their learning. A central theme throughout these initial chapters is the distinction between formal and informal tools for learning, and the difference between learners' ability to use technology and their ability to use technology within learning.

Part II offers a number of interesting *Frameworks for Understanding Learners Experiences*. Notable among the many concepts and models examined is the 'teaching-as-design' approach forwarded by Goodyear and Ellis, premised upon the active involvement of all individuals with a responsibility in the learning process as co-creators of an integrative (on-going and evolving) activity system. The learner voice can be heard most vividly in Chapter 9 in an insightful and at times humbling exploration of a disabled learner's experiences with technology in higher education. Nick Bishop, co-author alongside Jane Seale, provides a powerful first-hand account of the challenges he faced as a learner with cerebral palsy. Nick's own experiences perfectly illustrate the reported findings of the Disabled Learners' Experiences of e-Learning study (LExDis), which highlighted the importance of digital agility among disabled learners; the factors which influenced the decisions underpinning the technology they did or did not use; and the multitude of strategies adopted by disabled learners in order to manage their learning. The recommendations at the end of this chapter alone are grounds for making this text recommended reading for all academics.

Part III examines the concept of digital literacy. Emphasis is placed on dispelling the notions that all students are 'digitally literate' - that they have all had positive experiences in the use of technology prior to entering higher education. There is discussion around learners' on-task and around-task use of technology and in particular the role of academics in the monitoring of around-task activities. Linking neatly from this discussion the final chapter offers some practical suggestions aimed at academics to help their learners transfer the participatory skills many demonstrate in their personal networks to the academic context.

*Rethinking Learning for a Digital Age* provides evidence that learners are digitally active, agile and aware. It offers an insight into how technology is shaping and being shaped by education, and opens up new discussions around appropriate pedagogies, institutional strategies and the role of the learner and teacher in the digital age. The learner voices are in my head, and I encourage you to welcome them into your own by reading this book.