

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Technology Use and Research Approaches for Community Education and Professional Development

By Valerie Carson Bryan and Victor C.X. Wang
(Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2013, 338 pages)

You can hardly read an article or a book about recent developments without encountering some commentary about the accelerating rate of change. This rate of change is very often associated with new technologies. It is pervasive, powerful, and, in the minds of some, perilous (p. 3). These issues are not limited to a single field or geography, and observations made in one context are often transferable to another context.

Technology Use and Research Approaches for Community Education and Professional Development is a collection of the latest theories, perspectives, and practices related to the influence of technology in a community education and professional development environment. It represents a number of research articles and case studies that highlight various advantages and disadvantages of technologies and their applications. Its scope is specifically bound under the idea of technology-enhanced learning and takes a communal or “we” view of technology.

This approach is pertinent as the collection of articles represents currency in its topics and perspectives being examined as well as a deep view of recent and ongoing research. The broad topics included impact a variety of disciplines and an applied focus. Particular to the relevant focus is the number of connections to online learning and to social media in particular. In the last few years, one topic of technological importance has been associated with communication and social media. The various emerging social aspects of learning are well represented in the collection, providing the opportunity to examine its potential perils (chapters 1, 6, and 7) as well as the newly emerging construct of digital citizenship (Chapter 6).

Within the central thesis that binds the selected articles together is the idea that technology is more of a people issue than it is an object issue. Additionally, learning, from an individual and organizational viewpoint, is an active shared experience, often achieved, both formally and informally, through professional development for adult learners (p. 172). Furthermore, the central thesis speaks to the “overload” of information and ties to the principle of cognitive load, andragogy, and other frameworks common to a review on learning in general. A reminder of the adult learning principle of self-directedness (p. 55) is also part of the binding framework for the linkages between these articles.

Additional key ideas addressed in the book include the democratization of knowledge (Chapter 1), the collaborative nature of technology in learning through social media (throughout), and a technical literacy (Chapter 6). These key ideas are enhanced through the research application aspect of the articles. The articles represent the works of a number of current researchers who strive to be leading experts in the field. Thus, they provide a number of solid, empirically-based research studies and the corresponding results. Some case studies (chapters 7 and 14) provide triangulation for the heavier empirically quantitative chapters. A couple of the later chapters focus on the incorporation and use of technology, and the second half of the book is more focused on technology as a learning tool rather than learning technology for its own purpose.

The book has a number of commendable features, including representation from multiple continents and countries, the diverse fields drawn into the discourse, and the strong social component from various viewpoints. It is one of the better surveys of current research that I have seen on this topic. Notwithstanding the strengths listed above, there are a few shortcomings. A couple of the chapters did seem more out of place and the connection to education was a bit stretched. I think the book could have used a bit more narrative to connect the separate articles and assist the reader with understanding the flow that was being created. Structurally, some of the graphics were poorly captured from the source articles and hard to read or view. The introduction was a bit weak in its ability to walk us through the theme and had a bit too broad a view of community education and a bit too thin a view of the technological component. However, most of the shortcomings fell away as one got further into the book and the components of the topic fell into place. The first article, however, which supplemented the introduction, was an excellent choice for an opening chapter.

In summary, this book assists the reader in understanding the role of information communications technology in lifelong learning. It also provides a number of instructional design implications for those developing technology-enhanced learning curricula. In particular, discussions of the influence of social media on design, the “personalization” (p. 147) of learning, and how to match technologies to a learning outcome (p. 228) were quite illuminating. Overall, this book is a good survey of a number of researchers’ current findings with an applied focus. While you may not have an interest in all of the articles, a person interested in technology-enhanced learning is likely to find a number of chapters of interest to them.

Reviewed by Richard Rush, University of Victoria