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BOOK AND EBOOK REVIEW

Book Reviews – 2019

Kimberly Safford*, Francisco Iniesto*, Matthew Stranach†, Simon Paul Atkinson‡ and Pam Foley*

The following publication contains book reviews of these titles:

Ferster, B. (2016) *Sage on the Screen: Education, Media and How We Learn.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 197 pages. ISBN 13: 978-1-4214-2126-1.

Littlejohn, A and Hood, N. (2018) *Reconceptualising Learning in the Digital Age: The [Un] democratising Potential of MOOCs.* Singapore: Springer. 108 pages. ISBN: 978-981-10-8892-6, ISBN: 978-981-10-8893-3.

Hodgkinson-Williams, C and Arinto, P.B. (eds.) (2017) *Adoption and Impact of OER in the Global South*. Cape Town and Ottawa: International Development Research Centre & Research on Open Educational Resources. 606 pages. ISBN: 9781928331483.

Rankin, J.G. (2016) *How to Make Data Work: a Guide for Educational Leaders*. New York: Routledge. 226 pages. ISBN: 978-1-317-35338-6.

Saba, F. and Shearer, R.L. (2018) *Transactional Distance and Adaptive Learning, Planning for the Future of Higher Education*. London: Routledge. 212 pages. ISBN: 978-1-138-30233-4, ISBN: 9780203731819.

Review 1: Sage on the Screen: Education, Media and How We Learn (B. Ferster)

Review authored by: Kimberly Safford, The Open University, UK
Review of: Ferster, B. (2016) *Sage on the Screen: Education, Media and How We Learn.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 197 pages. ISBN 13: 978-1-4214-2126-1

This is a readable book by an experienced US university educator that charts the development of instructional media and educational technologies in the United States from the Thaumatrope to the Cloud. Chapters cover (1) *Traditional Media*: radio, cinema and television; (2) *Interactive Media*: the first iterations of random-access videodiscs that could hold, for instance, museum collections; (3) *Hypermedia*: the development of HyperCard to build non-linear, interconnected multimedia systems of texts and images on CD-ROMs and DVDs; (4) *Cloud Media*: the rise of Internet as a delivery vehicle for educational media, such as videos of classroom lectures and MOOCS

and (5) *Immersive Media*: virtual reality worlds and augmented realities on tablets and smartphones.

The final chapter (6) *Making Sense of Media for Learning* considers some of the implications for people who wish to develop or use instructional media. Here the author reviews the long-standing debate, between Richard Clark of the University of Southern California and Robert Kozma of the University of Michigan, about the effectiveness of educational media. Are media and technologies no more than 'delivery trucks' for instruction? Or, does good design of educational media create an effective and integral relationship between pedagogy and medium? How far is it possible to distinguish pedagogy from medium in order to evaluate the effectiveness of each element? These questions have long influenced the direction of research in the field.

The book's title promises an exploration of 'how we learn' and prompts us to extend our thinking about pedagogy. If a 'sage on the stage' is the expert lecturer who delivers knowledge to passive learners, and a 'guide on the side' is the supportive mediator who enables active learners, how do digital and multimedia technologies change the practices of instruction and education, and the interactions of learning and teaching? Theories of learning are lightly but usefully woven into chapters, from Vygotsky, Piaget and Bruner to flipped classrooms and Pagano's immersive learning taxonomy. There is an underdeveloped discussion of how designers of educational media

* The Open University, UK

† Thompson Rivers University, CA

‡ Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, NZ

Corresponding author: Kimberly Safford
(kimberly.safford@open.ac.uk)

appear to operate largely on a behaviourist model, where rapid and continuous feedback prompts the learner to adapt and change. Learning paradigms that involve communities of practice, peripheral participation, collaboration and social interaction seem to be missing from the analysis. The focus of *Sage on the Screen* is more historical and descriptive than deeply theoretical.

I can imagine experiencing this book, with its interesting images, as a series of lectures. I learned a lot about technological innovations for educational media and how these developed through scientific experiment, playful tinkering and imaginative hypothesising. *Sage on the Screen* contains many details and anecdotes about famous and less well-known US educators, thinkers, engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and large and small businesses, from Thomas Edison to Microsoft. Minority communities and women are largely absent from this narrative arc. Two outliers in the overwhelmingly white male pantheon are Wendy Keeney-Kennicutt who developed *Second Life*-style immersive 3D environments for her university students' chemistry syllabus, and Salman Kahn whose eponymous Academy hosts millions of lessons on YouTube.

Readers looking for a global perspective are likely to find *Sage on the Screen* limited in scope. Aside from early mentions of Marconi, John Logie Baird and Donald F. MacLean, the book locates developments in American universities, start-ups, broadcast media, education systems, museums, and Hollywood. There are myriad culturally-specific references, such as Groucho Marx, Duke Ellington, Bill Gates, Woody Allen, P.T. Barnum, Edward R. Murrow, SATs, AP classes, and *Mr. Ed* (a 1961 TV sitcom about a talking horse). The fact that readers around the world are likely to be familiar with all or most of these shows the global influence of the USA on chronicles of technology and multimedia, and the embeddedness of cultural imperialism. There is a single instance in the book of a brief, failed experiment in educational media in American Samoa. Also, readers seeking history or background on educational media for learners with physical or cognitive needs will have to search elsewhere.

The USA has led the development of educational technologies and multimedia, but it is not the only player. For instance, *Sage on the Screen* provides a detailed description of the genesis of the children's television programme *Sesame Street* and its first US broadcast in 1969. Around the same time, in 1971, the UK Open University began television broadcasts of its courses, and from 1979 the OU provided computer-assisted learning systems such as home minicomputers, Cyclops, Prestel and teleconferencing.[1] Readers of *Sage on the Screen* will not learn about European Union-wide initiatives such as Raspberry Pi, or about the spread of MOOCs and mobile learning across India and Sub Saharan Africa.

There is something slightly outdated about the depiction of educational media as a 'sage on the screen', particularly in later chapters where media become more interactive and learner-led. Nowadays, learners of all ages independently access smaller and faster online and offline devices, outside of educational institutions. The 'sages' in

these contexts are less likely to be teachers, lecturers or authors. The sages are the devices holding the content, with device users directing their own learning in the digital multiverse. To paraphrase one of the educators in the book, content hasn't changed (much) but learners have. 'Instructional media' is increasingly unmediated by sages.

Sage on the Screen is an accessible book for anyone interested in the history of educational media and the debates about its effectiveness in the USA and, by implication, the rest of the world. *Sage on the Screen* is not for readers seeking an international picture or a critical evaluation, particularly with regard to global inequalities, or with regard to the impact of technologies on young children who are the fastest-growing target consumers of educational media. The book's accounts of people, businesses, media and technologies are, for the most part, unproblematic. In the final pages we learn, in a brief sentence, that educational media today is funded almost exclusively by venture capital firms. Nevertheless, there is much in *Sage on the Screen* that is stimulating and thought-provoking, as the parameters and possibilities of how and where we teach and learn continue to expand.

Review 2: Reconceptualising Learning in the Digital Age: The [Un] democratising Potential of MOOCs

Review authored by: Francisco Iniesto, The Open University, UK
Review of: Littlejohn, A and Hood, N. (2018) *Reconceptualising Learning in the Digital Age: The [Un] democratising Potential of MOOCs.* Singapore: Springer. 108 pages. ISBN: 978-981-10-8892-6, ISBN: 978-981-10-8893-3

This book by Littlejohn and Hood is part of the Springer Briefs in Open and Distance Education. It involves an analysis of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which have changed substantially since they first appeared, at the time claiming a change in open education to adopt a traditional approach to online learning. That is why this book aims to give visibility to the tensions derived from what at one point was claimed and the situation of what MOOCs involve today. This book reflects with a critical voice on MOOCs being a disruptive and democratising influence over Higher Education.

To discuss these tensions, the book is divided into six chapters. "The Many Guises of MOOCs" places the readers in context: MOOCs are widely spread among providers across platforms around the world reaching millions of participants. The dimensions of MOOCs are variable, as are their pedagogical approaches and business models, the latter being an important factor in the introduction of fees and payment courses MOOCs have an important characteristic of self-regulated and lifelong learning, along with origins linked to the Open Education movement, with all the potential that entails. This is why the authors are careful to take the reader through the history and background of the MOOCs, with the definitions of