



Practical Pedagogy: *40 New Ways to Teach and Learn*
By Mike Sharples
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Review by David Longman

Readers with a personal or professional interest in education will mostly agree that it is a lively time to be involved in teaching and learning. Debates on all aspects of educational provision, methods and qualifications rise and fall like the tides. Today the tide is rising! What are effective ways to teach and for students to learn in a world that, by all accounts, is changing dramatically and to which, for some observers, our education system is less well adapted?

We live in a period of intense and sometimes, on social media, fierce assertiveness about the right or the wrong way to organise and provide useful education. It is important to avoid closure, to keep exploring and reduce the risk that a monoculture of teaching and learning will emerge as if there is but one way for students to learn or for teachers to teach. This book, offering forty *new* examples of ways to organise teaching and learning, is a useful and interesting contribution to this exploration, broadening our understanding of the methods and practice of teaching, or pedagogy.

The book is a selection, slightly revised, of pedagogical frameworks adaptable to a wide range of educational settings drawn from an annual series of reports titled '[Innovating Pedagogy](#)' published by the Open University Institute of Educational Technology from 2012-2019 (with further editions to follow). Aimed more deliberately at practitioners this is not necessarily a book to read all at once because it is not a continuous discussion on the theme of pedagogy. Instead, it is more like a compendium of different ways to think about and to experiment with the organisation of teaching and the creation of activities through which learning might be stimulated.

While the audience for this book is potentially wide and of interest to any active educator, it is likely to be of most value to practitioners working directly with students and learners of all levels and ages. It should not be read as a simple recipe book - a 'do this then do that' approach to pedagogy - for each example is presented in a bare-bones fashion and does not address in detail, for example, all the practical issues of implementation. Each chapter includes sources intended as a follow-up rather than as a traditional form of confirmation-by-

citation for the points made in the text. There is considerable room for the reader to bring their own experience and judgement to the evaluation of these diverse approaches.

Novice educators might therefore exercise some caution when thinking about how to implement an appealing pedagogical model they discover in this book. The setting in which the work of teaching is carried out needs to be conducive to experimentation and flexibility. For example, in many English secondary schools today, there is a strong focus on 'behaviour management' frequently accompanied by established and preferred pedagogies, usually variants of direct instruction (notably, a pedagogy not included in this book, in spite of recent developments). Even the experienced teacher working in such a setting would find it difficult to develop different approaches that could be seen contradict a preferred whole-school approach.

Of course, the range of possible settings in which these forty pedagogies might be realised is very much wider than secondary schools. Many practitioners work in settings with fewer implementation barriers at sixth form, university level or in work-based settings where there is more emphasis on experience and practical understanding. All this is for the reader to decide, although in some cases it might involve significant professional development, for example, where computer-based tools might form a significant element of the chosen pedagogy.

A strong feature of this book is the very wide range of curriculum content that it addresses either directly or indirectly. Science teachers, art teachers, humanities teachers, or language teachers might all find an approach here that could enriching the teaching and learning of at least some aspects of their subjects. (Mathematics education perhaps is not so strongly addressed directly although there are opportunities throughout these ideas where it too might be enriched e.g. in 'teachback'). Each chapter is supported with good links to resources, not too many but enough, although of course this necessitates that a reader spends the time to look at these in more detail for evidence and further leads. A small recursive point is that several of the pedagogies described in the book must be enacted in order to derive the most benefit from it (e.g. using 'personal inquiry', or 'navigating knowledge') and some are more readily tested directly by personal endeavour (e.g. 'learning through social media', 'MOOCs'). In effect, to get the most from this book the reader must a learner.

All the resources listed at the end of each chapter seem to be accessible online to readers so no special access to the listed content is required, as it might be if articles are behind a pay-walled journal archive. One minor editorial point is that only a few resources includes a full URL and most are presented with shortened addresses using *bit.ly*. These are given in their default format, i.e. using random character strings but these are often difficult to copy from the printed page into a browser. A small but useful enhancement here would be to have edited these shortened URLs to make use of a mnemonic string instead.

There will be some readers who might argue that at least some of the pedagogies outlined here are not entirely 'new' but perhaps just well established practices given a new(ish) name. For example, 'personal inquiry' is a long established pedagogy rooted in the writings of Dewey and others which find expression in many advisory commissions during the twentieth century, most famously perhaps the Plowden Report of 1967. Plowden endorsed many versions of pedagogical ideas to be found in this book such as 'learning through story-telling', 'incidental learning' or 'personal inquiry'.

For example, describing the pedagogy of 'incidental learning' the author writes: "Schools are recognizing that young children can learn through play and discovery" (p59). More appropriately, it might instead read: "Schools have long recognized that young children can learn through play and discovery". Making clear what is new about incidental learning as a pedagogy might help avoid this occasional dissonance.

However, although the book does not make a strong enough case for what is new in every example it is clear from many of the more recent sources that new research and new projects continue to develop our thinking about these 'legacy' pedagogies. Of course, it is also the case that there are genuinely new approaches to teaching and learning described here. 'Computational Thinking' is a clear case where computing is having a real effect on some aspects of teaching and learning enabling some difficult to access concepts and processes more real for even very young children while 'Spaced Learning' and 'Productive Failure' certainly offer some new approaches supported by indicative research findings.

In conclusion, this collection of pedagogical models can help to broaden our perspective. There is no single approach that can work for all learners or for all teachers. The book does not always answer all the questions that might arise for the reader but this is in keeping with its intention, to ensure an inquiry oriented approach and to ask the reader to think about what might work for them and their students that might produce a more effective education. Teachers and learners of all levels and capabilities can only benefit from actions arising from this book.