

## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Kreber, Carolin (Ed.) (2008). *The University and its Disciplines: Teaching and Learning Within and Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries*. New York and London: Routledge. Pages: 246. Price: 44.95 USD (paperback).

Reviewed by Suying Hugh, doctoral student, Higher Education program, University of Toronto & Creso M. Sá, Assistant Professor in Higher Education, University of Toronto

*The University and its Disciplines: Teaching and Learning Within and Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries*, explores the relationships among the disciplines, teaching and learning, and the wider discussion of the purpose of higher education. Resulting from an eponymous international colloquium, this volume is divided into seven sections, five of which are organized around research papers.

The initial chapters establish the disciplinary underpinnings of the university. This background frames how the disciplines interface with learning and the undergraduate experience. Disciplines are viewed as communities of practice, where faculty possess a certain ownership of the intellectual terrain and students undergo a process of acculturation. This disciplinary refrain is key to unlocking what the subsequent chapters have to offer.

Leading the second section, Donald's chapter examines teaching and learning in three disciplines: engineering, law and English. She determines that the structure of the disciplines enables differing pedagogies and rather varied learning experiences among students. The concept of "signature pedagogies" (Shulman, 2005) is employed by all authors in this section to relate modes of teaching to the indoctrinating qualities of disciplines. In short, the way education occurs is expected to shape the behaviour of future professionals.

In the third section, titled "Ways of Thinking and Practicing," Hounsell and Anderson's chapter reports findings from a survey of undergraduate students in two disciplines, biology and history. It analyzes how students learn as a result of interactions and communication with fellow students and faculty. It is often through faculty members that students are first exposed to the academic disciplines, so much hinges on this personal connection. Reimann's portrayal of faculty roles in teaching and supporting students to become disciplinary community members echoes this finding. Pace's presentation of the History Learning Project at Indiana University addresses "bottlenecks" in student learning in this field. Undergraduate students often understand the tasks of history differently

from the faculty, and the inculcation of disciplinary modes of reasoning may be quite challenging. Pace argues that adequately understanding this gap between faculty and student is essential for a breakdown in learning not to happen.

If faculty are somehow gatekeepers of disciplinary fiefdoms, the third and fourth sections of the book speak well to each other. The fourth section focuses on teaching, which Northedge and McArthur treat as a psychosocial and cognitive process. Correspondingly, the relationship built between the teacher and student is linked to the learning process. They argue that a “state of intersubjectivity”, where faculty and students share common understandings and meanings, is the basis for successful communication and leads to the success of the relationship. McArthur further discusses this relationship as an encounter between the unity of the community (the discipline) and the diversity of individual student backgrounds. (p. 119) For a satisfying learning experience, McArthur argues, students must find their own voices within disciplines and know that “disciplinary knowledge is contestable, open to critique and examination” (p. 125). Such sensibility is certainly more appreciated in some disciplines than others.

Referenced with frequency, Baxter Magolda’s chapter ties together multiple elements of the previous sections. Her longitudinal study following students from age 18 to 38 addresses the teaching, support, and ultimate learning that occurred at various points in their lives. The resulting Learning Partnerships Model incorporates various constructs discussed at length in other papers. The model includes three principles of “support” and “challenge” as students journey to “self authorship”— taking ownership of their learning experience. Baxter Magolda argues that student development toward self authorship is what allows them to be successful in the “supercomplex” world (Barnett, 2000) where a multifaceted understanding of self and the world is required (p. 146). Jenkins concurs, proposing that students develop a more “transdisciplinary” understanding even within the boundaries set by discipline-based curriculum (p. 165).

In part six, Trowler uses his research in South Africa to illustrate how specific national contexts interface with the disciplines to result in “teaching and learning regimes” (TLR). The eight components of Trowler’s TLR are: tacit assumptions, implicit theories of teaching and learning, recurrent practices, conventions of appropriateness, codes of signification, discursive repertoires, power relations, and subjectivities. Trowler argues that TLRs are in flux, rather than static. Moreover, they give a cultural context to teaching and learning. Another dimension of local contexts is provided by Roxå and Mårtensson, who claim that smaller groups of faculty who associate in departments (“significant networks”) shape their teaching and learning reality. This sixth section puts a wider frame around the constructs presented in preceding chapters.

*The University and its Disciplines* depicts teaching and learning as interdependent and dynamic processes that occur on the foreground of a disciplinary landscape. The roles of faculty as teachers in the context of disciplinary

communities, and the impressions left by those communities on students, are important dimensions of teaching and learning in higher education. Overall, this book may offer good insights for those interested in the intersection between disciplines and educational practice in universities. ♣

## REFERENCES

Barnett, R. (2000). Supercomplexity and the curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education*, 25(3), 255-265.

Shulman, L. S. (2005). Signature pedagogies in the professions. *Daedalus*, 134(3), 52-59.

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Levin, John S., Kater, Susan & Wagoner, Richard L. (2006). *Community College Faculty: At Work in the New Economy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pages: 198. Price: 52.95 CDN (hardcover).

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Having observed that the existing scholarship examining the effects of globalization and neo-liberalism on academic faculty focuses almost exclusively on universities, John Levin, Susan Kater and Richard Wagoner present “the first work . . . to use the concepts of neo-liberalism and globalization to explain faculty work in community colleges” (p. 25). The text first presents its “Themes and Overview”, followed by a discussion of the historical evolution “From Comprehensive Community College to *Nouveau* College”, and a review of “The Scholarly Literature, The Theoretical Bases, and Research Methods”. The authors draw on their combined experience as former community college faculty, former and present college administrators, and as scholars, to accomplish two primary goals: to examine the impact of external interests on community colleges and their faculty within what they define as the “New Economy” and to offer some suggestions to empower community college faculty as they (we) develop a professional identity and a defining role in the *nouveau* community college – a term the authors use to describe institutions that have adopted “a workforce development model that seeks to serve the ‘global economy’” (p. 8). Despite the fact that the “new economy” as understood when this book was being researched and written has been superseded by a *new* “new economy”, *Community College Faculty: At Work in the New Economy* offers valuable evidence to support the development of a professional identity for and by community college faculty even as changing institutional values and practices may threaten that identity and its related status.