

Book Review

Developing Learning Environments: Creativity, Motivation and Collaboration in Higher Education.

Ora Kwo, Tim Moore & John Jones, Editors (Hong Kong University Press, 2004)

Review by

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This edited volume from Hong Kong provides a welcome answer to a fundamental question in the scholarship of teaching and learning: can knowledge emerging from inquiry in particular classrooms and programs be of interest or use to faculty teaching elsewhere? Can it travel? And if so, how far? The air distance from Hong Kong to the San Francisco Bay area, where I am writing this review, is approximately 6,900 statute miles. But these essays, while retaining the specificity of their setting, cross national, cultural, and institutional boundaries with ease.

Hong Kong has had a special place in the international community that is forming around the scholarship of teaching and learning, no doubt because its universities are full participants in a wider Anglophone academic culture, facilitating the flow of people and ideas. Thus, as the editors note, when the Hong Kong's University Grants Committee revised its Research Assessment Exercise in 1999, it drew inspiration from Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990) to broaden the range of intellectual work that might be submitted to the RAE as "research," including the scholarship of teaching. Of course, there's a difference between recognizing such work at the policy level and building a thriving community of practice around it. However, as *Developing Learning Environments* makes clear, the scholarship of teaching and learning has made admirable headway in Hong Kong.

In a strong prologue, editors Ora Kwo, Tim Moore, and John Jones, set the stage for this development in a convergence of factors that have heightened the visibility of university teaching. In Hong Kong, as abroad, demands for accountability from a growing number of stake-holders, increasing competition for students, the move from elite to mass higher education, and the move towards greater integration of universities with the larger community have all contributed to the "need to update curriculum contents, pedagogical practices, assessment structures, and reward systems" (p3). But it is no simple task to design "programmes with more practical relevance," move from an "elitist model" of didactic pedagogy to a more interactive mode, and attend to helping students gain skills for lifelong learning. The scholarship of teaching and learning, the editors suggest, answers the call to develop richer learning environments for higher education.

The fifteen essays that follow, divided equally into sections on critical and creative thinking, motivation in learning, and collaboration in teaching and learning, present the questions, investigations, results, and analyses of scholarship of teaching and learning projects carried out by faculty and staff in universities in Hong Kong. They

come from a wide range of disciplines and cross-disciplinary collaborations, make use of a variety of research methods, and address an interesting set of pedagogical issues, including peer instruction, problem-based learning, use of case studies, critical thinking, interactive learning, online learning, and more. Their regional origin is evident in their attention to the specific needs of Hong Kong students-- for English language education, for example, or to get beyond the stereotype of Chinese students as passive learners. Readers will want to skim the contents and read the editors' section introductions to find the essays best suited to their own interests, but university teachers everywhere are faced with analogous questions and will find much worth pondering in these pages.

Fitness for travel does not come automatically, and the editors and authors of this engaging collection are to be commended for the care they've taken to ensure the wide relevance and appeal of their work. As Kwo explains in her Epilogue, the essays in this volume were originally presented at a 2001 conference on enhancing the quality of teaching. There followed a "rigorous selection process," and many "further interactions between editors and authors" (p.313). The result is a set of essays of high quality—they place their topics in the context of literature in the field, report on well-constructed cycles of innovation and investigation, and have interesting things to say in their analyses and conclusions. While projects in the scholarship of teaching and learning are not all conducted or reported in such an ambitious way, this book shows what's possible at the "high end" of educational experimentation.

Indeed, *Developing Learning Environments* is not just about what teachers can do individually in their classrooms. It is also about how the scholarship of teaching and learning can help faculty and staff work across internal boundaries (between departments and disciplines, between teaching and research, between institutions) and join in a collaborative quest for knowledge about the learning that students everywhere will need for responsible, rewarding, and compassionate lives in the 21st century. Kwo concludes: "Instead of being seen merely as a quick inspiration for worthwhile ventures, much of the work reported in this book is capable of generating questions to inspire further ideas for scholarly teaching and learning across disciplines in the community of teaching professionals" (p.321).