
As an educationalist first and foremost I usually find psychology books with education in the title fall into one of two categories. The heavy psychology theory laden textbook which promotes learning as something stemming from psychological models, or the ‘here’s how it works for educationalist’ type of book. Neither works for me. However in this book I was delighted to find that psychology sat alongside learning and education as an equal and throughout the book the style is lively, conversational and highly readable.

The book is essentially a collection of texts on how learning happens in three parts.

Part I Processes: an exploration of key learning processes

Part II Identities: examining the role of the mind and identity in learning.

Part III Origins: re-examining some of the core theories of learning

From Part 1 ‘Processes’ I became quite intrigued by the opening chapter on ‘Reconsidering the psychology of education’ I felt already as though I was actually involved a debate about the approaches of psychology to education and learning, and not on the outside looking in, as I do with many psychology of education books. By the second chapter I was engaged and Suzanne Egan’s Memory and Learning continued the early promise and by the time I got onto the second part of this chapter ‘imagining what could have happened’ I realised this was a book which has a questioning approach to how psychology is used in education and I felt this could be read by undergraduate and postgraduate education students without fear of being overwhelmed. It does have psychological theory in and plenty of it but the way it treats theory as background to learning and education rather than the prime aim of imparting theory will work for most educationalists. By Chapter Five ‘Embodiment, the mind and education,’ I thought here might be the heavy theory I had been suspecting but again it manages to interweave the models and concepts in a way which I could relate to learning.
Part II ‘Identities’ seems to cover pretty standard ground when the chapter titles are considered but on reading them you become aware it doesn’t. It continues the questioning and reflective debate on the way psychology interweaves with education rather than trying to explain it by promotion. I think it is this genuinely critical approach looking at the use of psychology in education is what makes this book different. Again the theories, models and concepts are there and yet for example in Chapter Six ‘Learning to relate’ the book leads you into learning the frameworks though a hypothetical case study involving the relationship between Peter and Paul.

Part III Origins perhaps sums the book up perfectly. Subtitled ‘re-examining some of the core theories of learning,’ pulls the approach together perfectly. Here is a critical look at some of the ways we are told we learn and provides an open an honest assessment of the main theories of learning including: Piaget, Behaviourism, and Vygotsky. It does this in the same lively style as the rest of the book and again manages to keep the educationalist and learning at the front of the debate.

Throughout the chapters in the book there are Research Focus sections which were as directive as they were illuminating – something which should promote further reading, I also liked the Reflections boxes which asked the researcher to actually think about the research done as well as the theories and should give researches a sense of positionality which is often neglected especially in early career research.

I suspect the book may have been targeted at the postgraduate education student/early career research market but this is not just another psychology of education book. Its style and approach is lively and critical and perhaps should not just be seem as a re-examination of the theories and models of psychology in education and learning but as a way to approach a book for educationalist who want to know how psychology might relate to their subject. This really does engage the concept of learning as a primary function and builds into a great overview of how learning and psychology go hand in hand. A great book for educationalists who want to understand more about how we learn from a psychological perspective and highly recommended.

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