



## **Education Article Review**

**August, 2014**

As part of supporting OHS educators the Accreditation Board will present occasional reviews of a selection of articles relevant to OHS education. In this review Emeritus Professor Bruce King, education advisor to the Board, provides comment on three articles. The articles are linked in that they have a common author, Paul Kirschner, and they address issues of interest to OHS educators.

**Kirschner, P.A., van Merriënboer, J. (2013) Do learners really know best? Urban legends in education. Educational Psychologist. Vol. 48, No.3, pp.169-183.**

Do learners really know best? The short answer here is – resoundingly – No! This is a challenging article, both because it reflects negatively on much current conventional wisdom in education but also constitutes a serious piece of scholarship that weighs considerable evidence, mainly drawn from psychology, over two decades of research. It is worth skimming, first to see what issues are being considered, and then the conclusions the authors draw from the literature. You might then want to examine the evidential base they draw upon. They use “Urban Legends” to describe what I have thought of as “Convenient Myths” by which I mean perspectives for which there is no evidence but people find plausible as explanations of the world around them (and which don’t require them to think further about difficult matters). Their term, however, carries the appropriate recognition of very widespread currency of the inaccurate belief. Mine tends more to the personal. The article focuses on students in the digital era and challenges their computer literacy, arguments that teaching should address individual learning styles, and what might be called learner-centred education. At base, the authors deliberately go back to earlier studies to debunk claims about how students now might be learning and to suggest we rely on what evidence we actually have about effective teaching. Their position will be seen by many as very conservative, but it is hard to dismiss the comprehensive material they draw upon or the huge swathe they cut through conventional wisdom.

**Kirschner, P.A., Sweller, J., & Clark, R.E. (2006) Why minimal guidance during instruction does not work: An analysis of the failure of constructivist, discovery, problem-based, experiential, and inquiry-based teaching. Educational Psychologist Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 75-86.**

This paper is a companion piece to the Urban Myths discussion. It argues that minimal guidance approaches to teaching, encompassing a range of positions including discovery learning, problem based learning, and most recently constructivism, are really all of a kind, just different labels on the same bottles. Again, it draws heavily on the literature over three decades and centres on the role of long-term memory and working memory in learning. This is hardly surprising for what is essentially a psychological discussion. It argues for the efficacy of direct instruction and provides a devastating critique of some well-known applications of problem-based learning, e.g. in medical training. I am familiar with the education tradition within which these authors operate, i.e. instructional design theory, and generally share their view that teaching is a purposeful activity (not that they put it quite that way). Yet I find myself uncomfortable that their argument could be misread as opposing workshops, practical experience, and group approaches to learning. I think what they would advocate is that such experiences need to be firmly guided. We know that many problems faced in professional practice involve collaborative input from people with different expertise, in an attempt to come to a defensible position in a context where there



may be no absolutely right answer. I don't think the authors would disagree. What I think they would argue that is developing the capacity to engage meaningfully in such collaborations needs to be explicitly taught and practised, rather than being left to students to find their own way to it.

**Martens, R., Bastiaens, T., Kirschner, P.A. (2007) New learning design in distance education: the impact in student perception and motivation. Distance Education. Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 81-93.**

One has to feel a certain sympathy for the three authors of this piece. They are all full professors, with at least partial employment commitments at the Open University of the Netherlands, and their institution is committed to implementing approaches to teaching that they believe are fundamentally unsound. This is a research article, designed to test, inter alia, the differences between perceptions of computer supported constructivist learning courses of students on the one hand, and course developers on the other. As such, it is not as confronting as the other two papers from essentially the same panel of authors. This means it is perhaps less interesting to educators generally, but will appeal more obviously to those concerned with the research base of e-learning that has a constructivist orientation or who have real intellectual commitment to student-centred approaches.

Readers may find the following articles in *The Conversation* of interest. The first looks at some of the features of lectures that impact on learning; the second, while directed at school-based education, discusses some of the characteristics of good teachers which apply across the spectrum of education.

<http://theconversation.com/are-lectures-a-good-way-to-learn-26905>

<http://theconversation.com/expert-panel-what-makes-a-good-teacher-25696> .

Please pass this article review on to colleagues who may be interested.

Anybody interested in contributing a comment or review of a series of articles or initiating a discussion on matters related to OHS education please contact Pam Pryor at [registrar@ohseducationaccreditation.org.au](mailto:registrar@ohseducationaccreditation.org.au).