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Book Review: *Exploring Research Based Teaching* (New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 106) by Carolin Kreber, Editor (Jossey-Bass, 2006)

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Abstract

Excerpt: This volume is divided into three sections: the necessity of promoting synergies between teaching and research and the ways in which these synergies might be achieved; research based teaching as students engaging in inquiry based learning; and research based teaching as teaching based upon pedagogical enquiry.

Keywords

Carolin Kreber, Research based teaching

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Book Review

Exploring Research Based Teaching

(New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 106)

Carolyn Kreber, editor (Jossey-Bass, 2006)

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This volume is divided into three sections: the necessity of promoting synergies between teaching and research and the ways in which these synergies might be achieved; research based teaching as students engaging in inquiry based learning; and research based teaching as teaching based upon pedagogical enquiry.

In chapter one Kremer explores why the “research-teaching nexus should concern us at all” with meeting the needs of students playing a key part in her answers. In chapter two Brew outlines the institutional and strategic factors for success in integrating research and teaching whilst in chapter three Castley focuses on the ways that an academic practice unit can work to foster links between research and teaching in an institution.

Chapter four moves us more concretely to research based teaching as students engaging in inquiry based learning. Elton states that at University level a strong link between teaching and research is “essential” for “effective” teaching and that the only way to achieve this goal across an undergraduate curriculum as a whole is to engage in teaching “that leads to learning in a research mode.” This teaching would take the form of problem-based learning and inquiry based learning. This, of course, begs the question concerning how to embed inquiry based learning across a curriculum.

Healey and Jenkins address this question in chapter five by providing strategies for effecting change at a curriculum level. In particular, “change agents” need to appreciate where faculty “are at” and faculty need to be supported in examining their courses in terms of the variety of inquiry based teaching approaches appropriate to their context whilst also being provided with case study examples of inquiry based teaching. One of these inquiry based approaches might be Karuka’s Hypertext model presented in chapter six. Karuka argues that the hypertext nature of the Net frees students of “linear and spatial” constraints and that it provides students with a degree of control over their own learning, thereby encouraging metacognitive skills such as decision-making and reflection. Learner “chaos” is avoided through WebQuests or collaborative directed inquiries that are set up by the instructor.

Chapter seven moves us to teaching based on pedagogical inquiry. Whilst recognising the value of general pedagogical theory and research, Huber suggests that faculty disciplines can lead to “innovation and inquiry” into teaching and learning and that there are distinct advantages to such an approach. A discipline approach is grounded in faculty members’ concerns with their own teaching and

the research method for gauging the effectiveness of the innovation can come from the discipline itself. Finally, in a time when “knowledge practices” are changing, a discipline approach to inquiry based teaching may “reconfigure expectations” around teaching and learning in particular disciplines.

In chapter eight Kreber takes the broader perspective that both discipline specific and generic pedagogical knowledge are necessary for teaching based on pedagogical inquiry, an activity considered essential to create “meaningful and effective” learning experiences to prepare students for the multiple roles that they will have to fulfil upon graduation. Just what constitutes meaningful and effective learning is open to question and D’Andrea addresses this issue in chapter nine. Considering methodological issues related to pedagogical inquiry in higher education, D’Andrea argues for the necessity of conceptualising the pedagogical question to be asked and framing the teaching investigation appropriately. She also indicates the need for a greater degree of professionalism around the scholarship of teaching and learning and suggests that Education Development Centres have a role to play in this regard.

In chapter ten Gosling questions the assumption that pedagogic inquiry will lead to improved teaching practice and to institutional improvement. Whilst concluding that inquiry into teaching can lead to reflection about practice, impact on students, to questioning practices that have been taken for granted and to a greater awareness of the teaching context, classroom research is not characterised by the methodological rigour of the sciences – a point recognised by Elton – and conclusions drawn from actions taken are not generalizable. However, Huber suggests that as action research these inquiries have value for the teacher and for the wider community in terms of sharing practice that can be “built upon.”

The strength of this book lies in the fact that it provides three different perspectives on research-based teaching. However, it is a relatively slim volume at 113 pages and, therefore, the subject matter of each chapter is not pursued in any great detail. This means that, for example, those familiar with the strategic issues around the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education or with the challenges faced by academic practice units are unlikely to find anything new in this book. The book is, however, to be recommended to those new to the area of the scholarship of teaching and learning as an excellent introduction and overview of the various facets of the scholarship of teaching and learning. The reader will also find a number of areas – for example Elton’s and Gosling’s thoughts on evaluating the effectiveness of changes in teaching practice – that will prompt deeper thought.